

Raising Student Achievement: *Florida's Compelling Evidence*



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Florida Department of Education
John L. Winn, Commissioner

Forward

On April 7, 2005, U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings announced a new approach to implementing the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) law. In her remarks, she said “States that show results and follow the principles of No Child Left Behind will be eligible for new tools to help them meet the law’s goal of getting every child to grade level by 2013-14.” Some of the tools will come in the form of new flexibilities awarded to states that are able to demonstrate success under the four guiding principles of NCLB: ensuring students are learning; making the school system accountable, ensuring information is accessible and options are available; and improving the quality of teachers.

This document—*Raising Student Achievement: Florida’s Compelling Evidence*— was prepared in response to this announcement. Under each of the four NCLB principles, we have demonstrated both our commitment and our successes. In a separate section, we have shown how our sound education policies go above and beyond what is required. Through the development of this document, it became clear that Florida leads the nation in the implementation of NCLB.

For example, Florida is clearly a leader in measuring student achievement. Through the A+ Plan we have moved beyond a status model of accountability where school results are compared year to year to one that is based on the academic growth of individual students and is capable of setting individual proficiency goals. Florida does this through our learning gains measure—a calculation unique to Florida. This measure arose from the vision to make sure that every child gains a year’s worth of learning in a year’s time.

In addition to the use of learning gains in our A+ system, Florida is leading the way in other areas as well. Florida has data resources that make it possible for us to aggregate and disaggregate all of the student performance and other data required by NCLB, and in many instances (i.e., learning gains) we have the capacity to exceed the requirements of NCLB. Florida also institutes school choice options when a school has failed to meet state standards for two out of four years. We also have two statewide voucher programs; one for students with disabilities and another for students from low-income families. These three programs combine for the largest voucher program in the nation.

All measures of academic achievement are showing that Florida is moving in the right direction. In addition to improving student achievement on our state assessment, Florida’s commitment to rising student achievement is being demonstrated through improvement on the NAEP, high school graduation rates, and participation and success in Advanced Placement coursework. Some of our greatest student achievement gains are being made by our minority students—narrowing the achievement gap in Florida.

The evidence is in—and it is compelling—Florida is raising student achievement.

John L. Winn
Commissioner

Table of Contents

	Page
Forward	i
Florida—Stronger Than Ever	1
Principle #1: Florida is ensuring all students are learning.	2
Figure 1 Reading FCAT, Grades 3-10, Percent Level 3 and Above	2
Figure 2 Mathematics FCAT, Grades 3-10, Percent Level 3 and Above	3
Figure 3 FCAT Reading Trends Grade 4 Students Achieving Level 1	3
Figure 4 FCAT Reading Trends Grade 8 Students Achieving Level 1	4
Figure 5 FCAT Reading Trends Grade 10 Students Achieving Level 1	4
Figure 6 FCAT Reading Trends Grade 4 Students Achieving Level 3 and Above	5
Figure 7 FCAT Reading Trends Grade 8 Students Achieving Level 3 and Above	5
Figure 8 FCAT Reading Trends Grade 10 Students Achieving Level 3 and Above	6
Figure 9 FCAT Mathematics Trends Grade 4 Students Achieving Level 1	7
Figure 10 FCAT Mathematics Trends Grade 8 Students Achieving Level 1	7
Figure 11 FCAT Mathematics Trends Grade 10 Students Achieving Level 1	8
Figure 12 FCAT Mathematics Trends Grade 4 Students Achieving Level 3 and Above	8
Figure 13 FCAT Mathematics Trends Grade 8 Students Achieving Level 3 and Above	9
Figure 14 FCAT Mathematics Trends Grade 10 Students Achieving Level 3 and Above	9
Figure 15 2004 AYP Report – State Level	10
Figure 16 2003 AYP Report – State Level	10
Figure 17 NAEP Grade 4 Reading Scores – All Students 1998, 2002 and 2003	11
Figure 18 Florida NAEP Grade 4 Mathematics Scores At National Average for the First Time	12
Principle #2: Florida is holding the school system accountable.	13
Figure 19 FCAT 2005 Administration	13
Figure 20 Florida's Student Participation Rates	16
Figure 21 Florida High School Graduation Rates by Race, 1998-99 to 2003-04	18
Figure 22 Dropout Rate Trends for Florida's Largest Ethnic Groups	19
Figure 23 Florida's Calculation of ESE Graduation Rates	19
Figure 24 Florida's Statewide NCLB High School Graduation Rate	20
Figure 25 Amount of Increase in NCLB Graduation Rates by Subgroup, 2000-01 to 2003-04	20
Principle #3: Florida ensures information is accessible and options are available.	21
Figure 26 Sample – Annual Report Card 2004	23
Figure 27 Growth in Florida's Charter Schools, 1996 – 2005	26
Principle #4: Florida is improving the quality of our teachers.	28
Figure 28 Percentage of Classes Taught by Highly Qualified Teachers	28
Figure 29 Sample Parent Notification Letter in English and Spanish	29
Figure 30 Annual Number of Teachers Certified by the National Board for Professional Standards	33
Sound Education Policy: Above and Beyond the Principles of NCLB	34
Figure 31 School Recognition Awards, 1999 through 2004	36
Figure 32 Students Participating in the Opportunity Scholarship Program	37
Figure 33 Students Participating in the McKay Scholarship Program	37
Figure 34 Reading Coaches, Principals and K-3 Teachers Trained by Just Read, Florida!	39
Figure 35 Sample School Return on Investment (ROI) Index	43

Florida —Stronger Than Ever

All measures of academic achievement show that Florida is moving in the right direction and, in fact, is stronger than ever.

Education in Florida	Before the A+ Plan (1998-99)	Now (2003-04)
School Grades —More schools are improving, even after we raised the bar in 2001.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 202 As; 313 Bs; 1230 Cs; 601 Ds; 76 Fs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1262 As; 540 Bs; 615 Cs; 184 Ds; 49 Fs
Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) —More students are reading on grade level, and we are closing the achievement gap.	<u>4th Graders Reading on Grade Level</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 51% of all students 23% of African American students 38% of Hispanic students 	<u>4th Graders Reading on Grade Level</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 70% of all students 53% of African American students 63% of Hispanic students
National Assessment of Educational Progress —Florida shows dramatic improvement in reading, leads the nation in writing improvement and is the <u>only</u> state to show improvement in 4 th grade reading.	<u>4th Grade Reading</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Median score: 206 Median for African American students: 186 Median for Hispanic students: 198 <u>4th Grade Writing</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Florida did not participate 	<u>4th Grade Reading</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Median score: 218 Median for African American students: 198 Median for Hispanic students: 211 <u>4th Grade Writing</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Florida ranked 8th in the nation
Number of High School Students taking PSAT — More students taking the PSAT in Florida than ever before—we lead the nation in minority test takers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 43,184 total test takers 4,459 total African American test takers 5,621 total Hispanic test takers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 116,341 sophomore test takers 22,349 African American test takers (up 401%) 27,341 Hispanic test takers (up 386%)
Number of High School Students taking Advanced Placement (AP) courses — Increase more than twice the national increase.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 34,607 AP test takers 2,595 African American AP test takers 6,181 Hispanic AP test takers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 67,559 AP test takers 6,038 African American AP test takers 14,710 Hispanic AP test takers
Graduation Rate —Florida accounts for every student and our graduation rate is on the rise.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 60.2% of all students 48.7% of African American students 52.8% of Hispanic students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 71.6% of all students 57.3% of African American students 64.0% of Hispanic students
Dropout Rate —Fewer students dropping out.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 5.4% among all students 6.6% among African American students 8.3% among Hispanic students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2.9% among all students 3.6% among African American students 3.7% among Hispanic students
Florida's Community Colleges — Nearly half are in the nation's top 100, five of them in the top 10.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 737,864 students enrolled 25,720 earned Associate degrees 15,783 successfully transferred into the State University System 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 816,290 students enrolled 30,809 earned Associate degrees 16,454 successfully transferred
University Enrollment Under One Florida, without the use of racial quotas, minority enrollment is up.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 32.2% of all students were minority 35.6% of university freshmen were minority 20.7% of new graduate students were minority 24.3% of new law students were minority 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 35% of all students are minority 37% of university freshmen are minority 21.4% of new graduate students are minority 34.2% of new law students are minority

Florida Leads the Nation in Implementing the Principles of NCLB

Principle #1: Florida is ensuring all students are learning.

- Florida is raising overall achievement and closing achievement gaps.

Florida has made significant improvement in overall achievement and in specific grade levels on the FCAT, particularly for subgroups.

Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT)—More students are reading on grade level, and we are closing the achievement gap.	1998-99 4 th Graders Reading on Grade Level	2003-04 4 th Graders Reading on Grade Level
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 51% of all students 23% of African American students 38% of Hispanic students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 70% of all students 53% of African American students 63% of Hispanic students

The FCAT results released in 2004 continued the trend of rising student achievement in Florida. The greatest improvements over 2003 continued to be in reading among elementary grades, with 68 percent of third and fourth grade students reading at or above grade level, compared to 55 percent in 2001.

From 2001 to 2004, Florida students have shown significant progress in both reading and mathematics. Last year, minority students continued to narrow the achievement gap, with both Hispanic and African American students improving nearly twice as fast in reading and three times as fast in mathematics as their white counterparts (see figures 1 and 2). The data include the percentage of students scoring at Level 3 and above. There are five categories of achievement that describe the success students have with the content tested on FCAT reading and mathematics. Level 5 is the highest, and level 1 is the lowest. Levels 3 and above are considered on or above grade level.

Figure 1
Reading FCAT, Grades 3-10,
Percent Level 3 and Above

	2001	2002	2003	2004
White	59%	60%	63%	63%
African American	25	28	30	32
Hispanic	35	38	40	42
All Students	46	48	50	51

Figure 2
Math FCAT, Grades 3-10,
Percent Level 3 and Above

	2001	2002	2003	2004
White	60%	64%	67%	68%
African American	25	28	31	34
Hispanic	39	42	46	49
All Students	48	51	53	56

FCAT Reading Trends – Grades 4, 8 and 10: Florida's focus on improving reading skills among elementary students is reflected in increases in FCAT Reading scores, especially at the 4th grade level. These results are corroborated by Florida's impressive gains in 4th grade reading scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), as shown later in this document.

As is illustrated in the data, the percentage of students scoring Level 1 continues to decline (see figures 3-5), while the percentage of students scoring Level 3 and above continues to increase (see figures 6-8). Note: Exceptional Student Education (ESE) is used interchangeably with Students with Disabilities (SWD).

Reading Trends: Percentage of Students Achieving Level 1

Figure 3

**FCAT Reading Trends
Grade 4 Students Achieving Level 1**

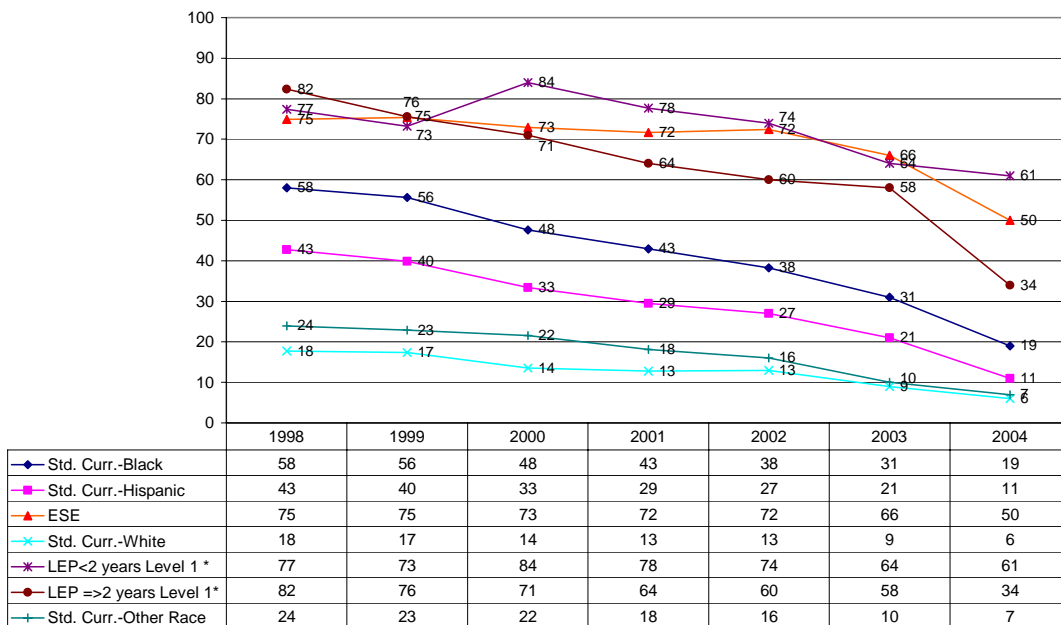


Figure 4

FCAT Reading Trends Grade 8 Students Achieving Level 1

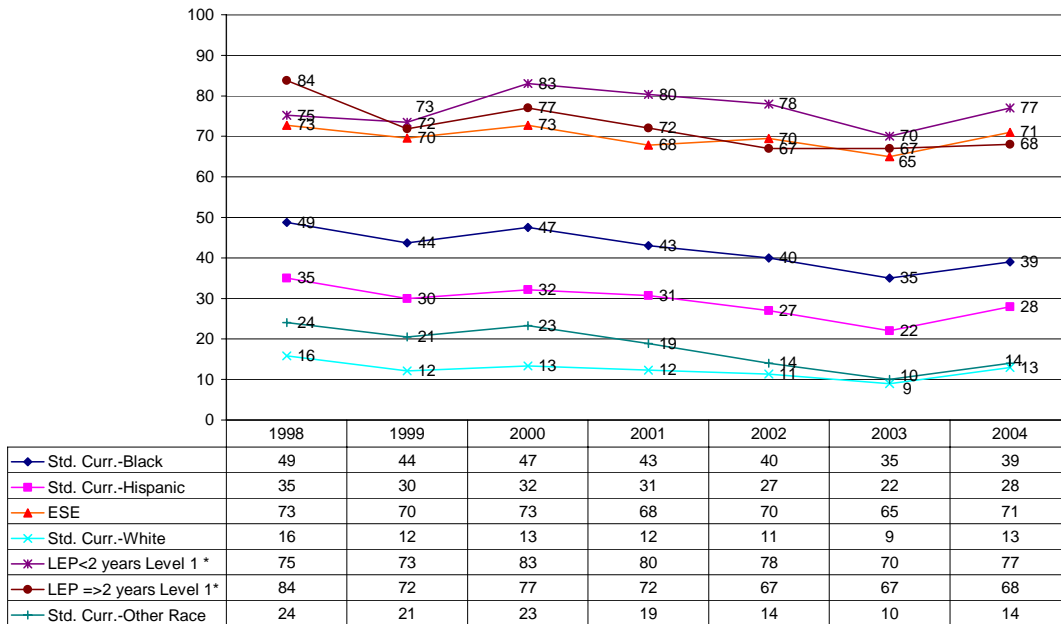
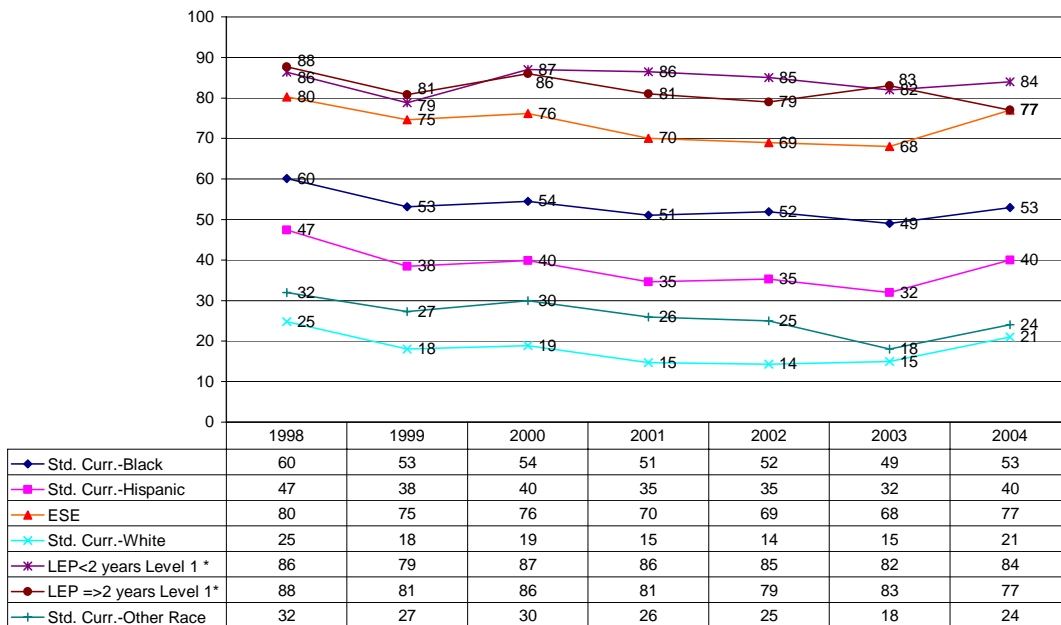


Figure 5

FCAT Reading Trends Grade 10 Students Achieving Level 1



Reading Trends: Percentage of Students Achieving Level 3 and Above

Figure 6

**FCAT Reading Trends
Grade 4 Students Achieving Level 3 and Above**

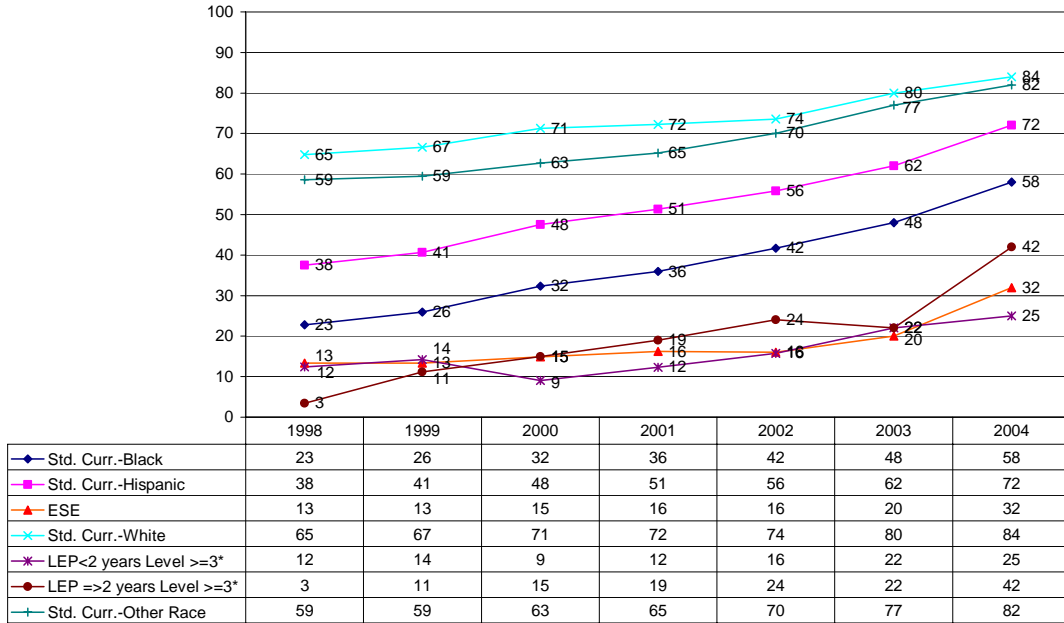


Figure 7

**FCAT Reading Trends
Grade 8 Students Achieving Level 3 and Above**

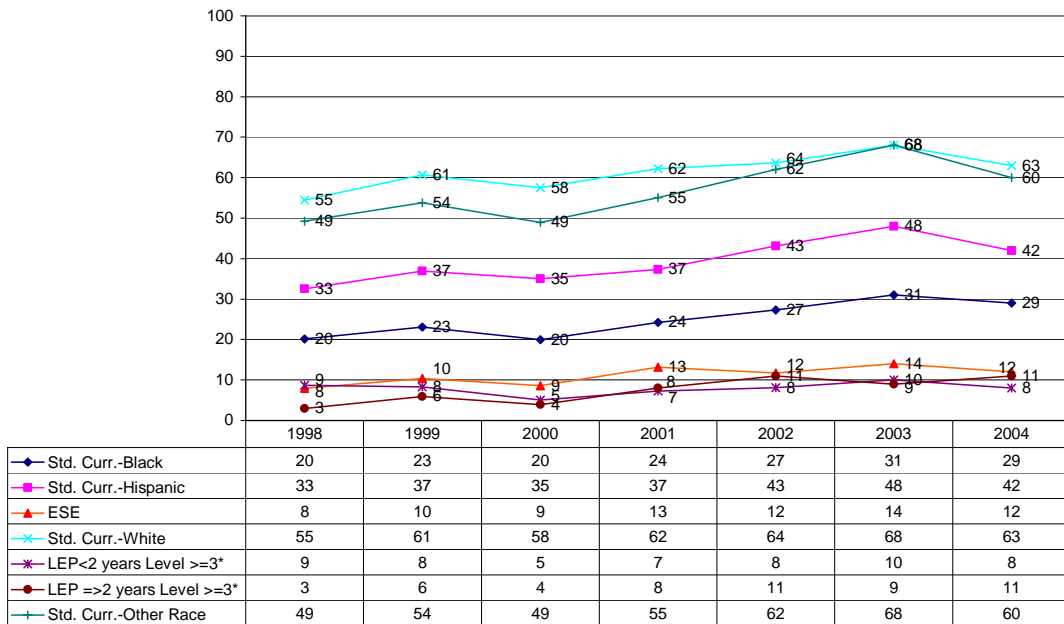
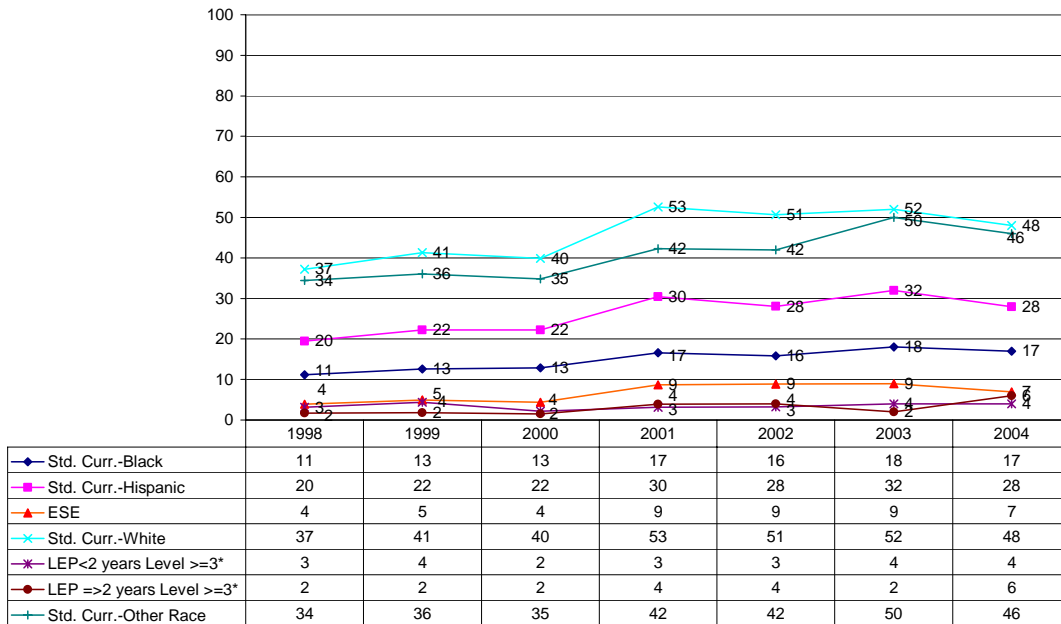


Figure 8

FCAT Reading Trends Grade 10 Students Achieving Level 3 and Above



FCAT Mathematics Trends – Grades 5, 8 and 10: In 2004, every grade except 6th and 8th grade showed improvement in mathematics. As with the reading results, Florida has made significant progress in reducing the percentage of students scoring Level 1 (see figures 9-11) and increasing the percentage of students scoring Level 3 and above (see figures 12-14).

Mathematics Trends: Percentage of Students Achieving Level 1

Figure 9

FCAT Mathematics Trends
Grade 5 Students Achieving Level 1

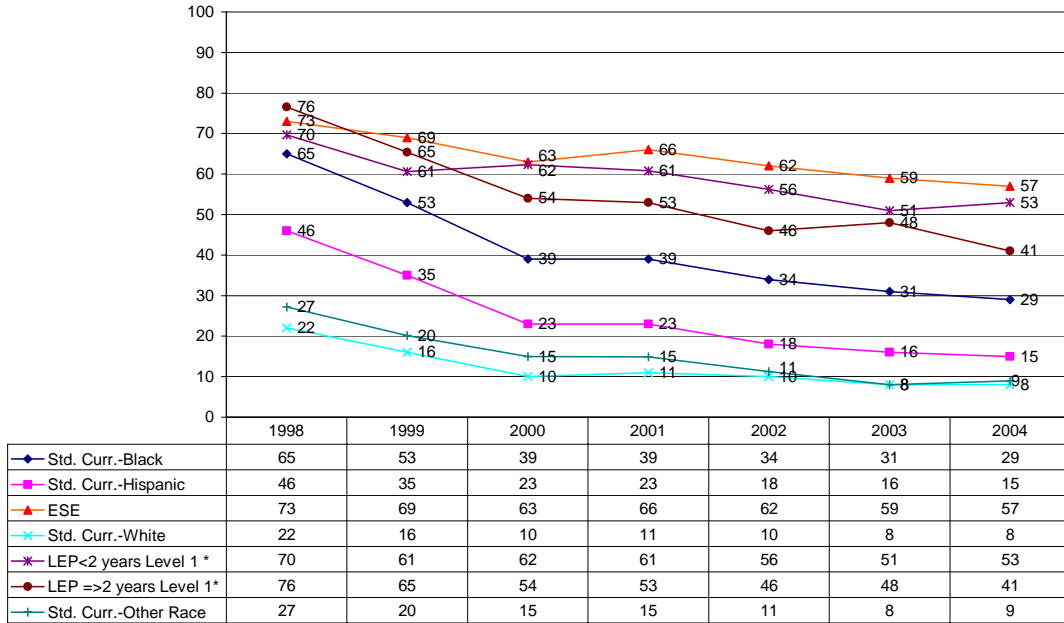


Figure 10

FCAT Mathematics Trends
Grade 8 Students Achieving Level 1

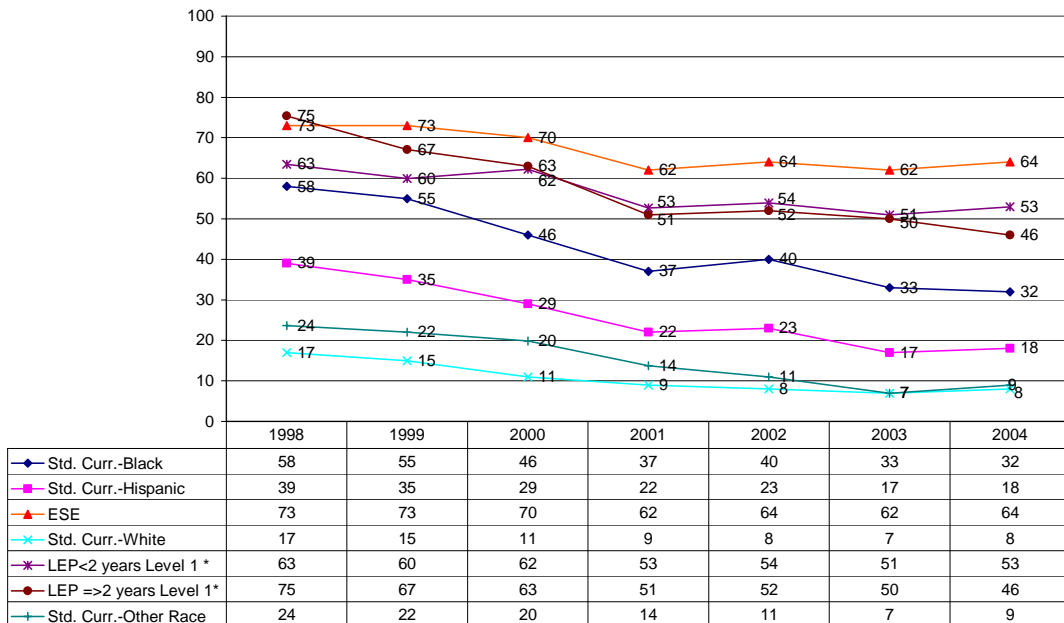
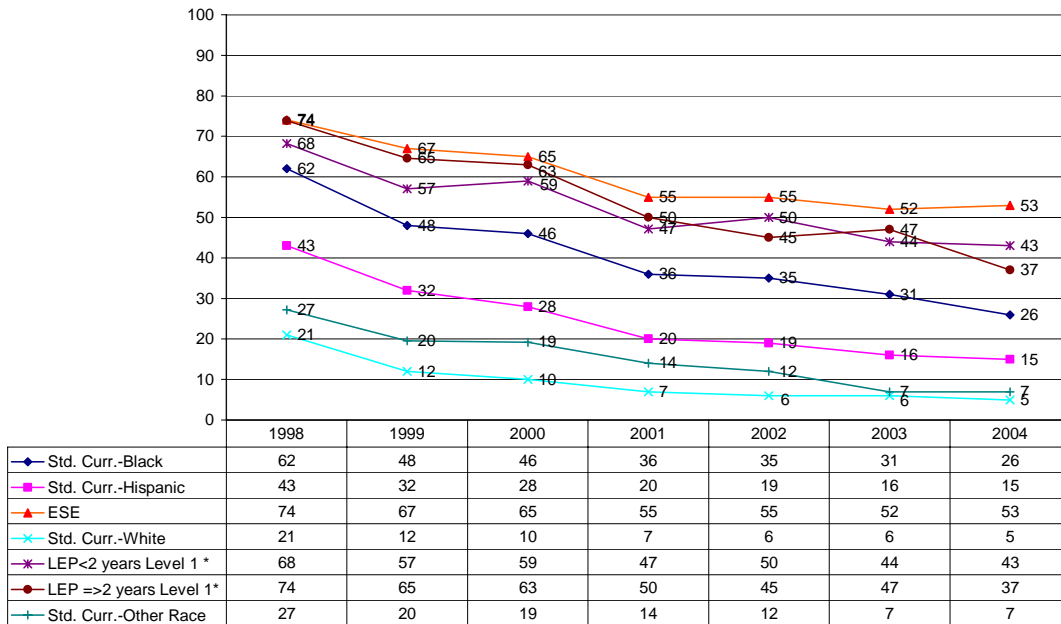


Figure 11

FCAT Mathematics Trends
Grade 10 Students Achieving Level 1



Mathematics Trends: Percentage of Students Achieving Level 3 and Above

Figure 12

FCAT Mathematics Trends
Grade 5 Students Achieving Level 3 and Above

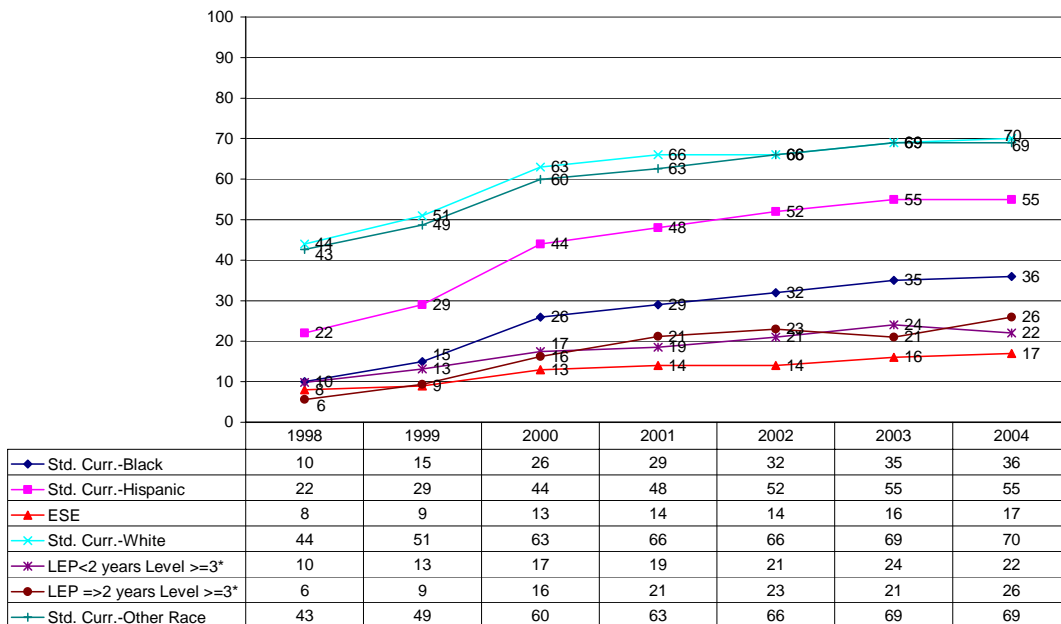


Figure 13

FCAT Mathematics Trends Grade 8 Students Achieving Level 3 and Above

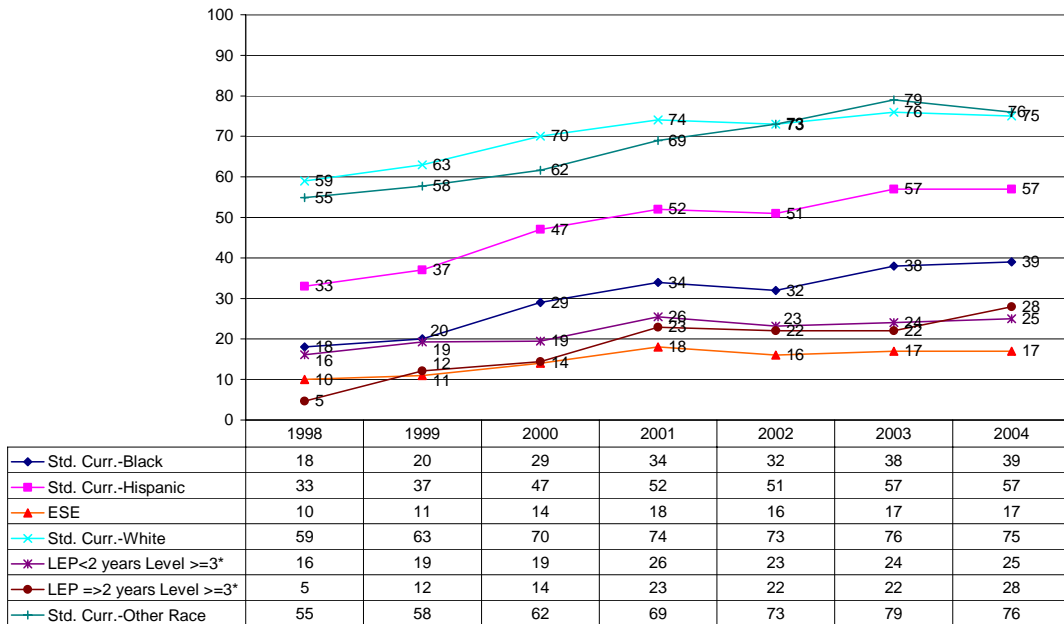
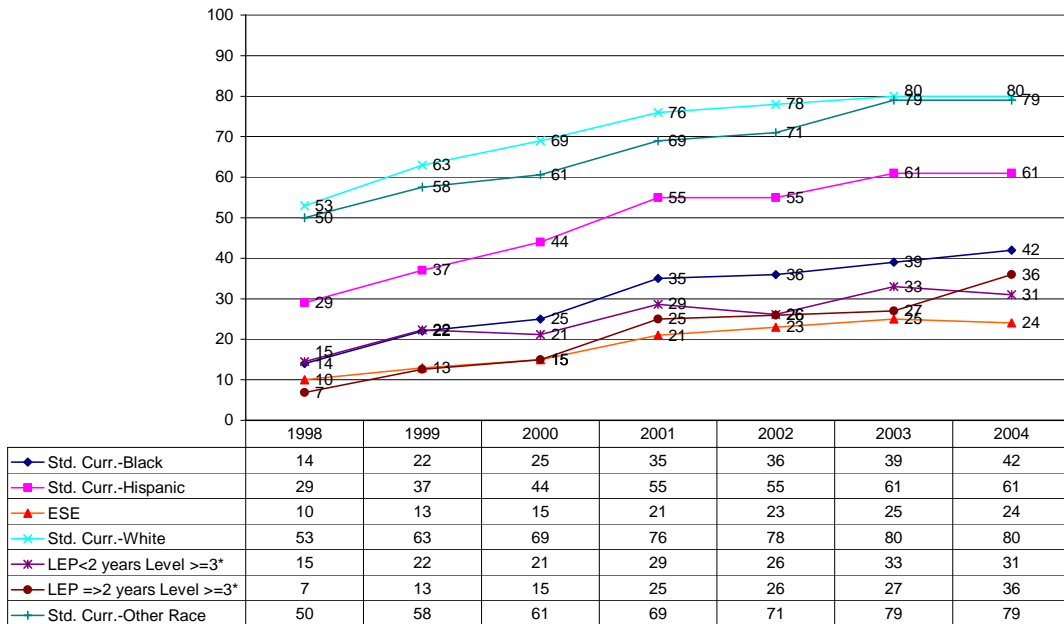


Figure 14

FCAT Mathematics Trends Grade 10 Students Achieving Level 3 and Above



Florida shows a commitment to improving Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) results.

In 2003-04, all subgroups met the testing requirement and seven out of nine subgroups met math proficiency standards (see figure 15), an improvement over Florida's 2002-03 results (see figure 16).

Figure 15

2004 AYP Report - State Level			
Did the State Make AYP: No			
Total Writing Proficiency Met: No			
Total Graduation Criterion Met: Yes			
	95% Tested	Reading Proficiency Met	Math Proficiency Met
Total	YES	YES	YES
White	YES	YES	YES
African American	YES	YES	NO
Hispanic	YES	YES	YES
Asian	YES	YES	YES
American Indian	YES	YES	YES
Economically Disadvantaged	YES	YES	YES
Limited English Proficiency	YES	NO	YES
Students with Disabilities	YES	NO	NO

Figure 16

2003 AYP Report - State Level			
Did the State Make AYP: No			
Total Writing Proficiency Met: Yes			
Total Graduation Criterion Met: Yes			
	95% Tested	Reading Proficiency Met	Math Proficiency Met
Total	YES	YES	YES
White	YES	YES	YES
African American	NO	YES	NO
Hispanic	YES	YES	YES
Asian	YES	YES	YES
American Indian	YES	YES	YES
Economically Disadvantaged	YES	YES	YES
Limited English Proficiency	NO	NO	NO
Students with Disabilities	NO	NO	NO

For more information: <http://web.fldoe.org/NCLB/default.cfm>

Florida National Assessment of Educational Progress results show overall improvement and reductions in the achievement gap.

National Assessment of Educational Progress— Florida shows dramatic improvement in reading, leads the nation in writing improvement and is the <u>only</u> state to show improvement in 4 th grade reading.	1998-99 4th Grade Reading <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Median score: 206 Median for African American students: 186 Median for Hispanic students: 198 	2003-04 4th Grade Reading <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Median score: 218 Median for African American students: 198 Median for Hispanic students: 211
	1998-99 4th Grade Writing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Florida did not participate 	2003-04 4th Grade Writing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Florida ranked 8th in the nation

Florida is the only state to show significant improvement in fourth grade reading and has posted improvement in both reading and math for nearly all student groups. Florida surpassed the national average in fourth grade reading (see figure 17) and is at the national average in fourth grade math for the first time (see figure 18). While eighth grade achievement is consistent with national trends, Florida's mathematics scores improved more than the national average.

Figure 17

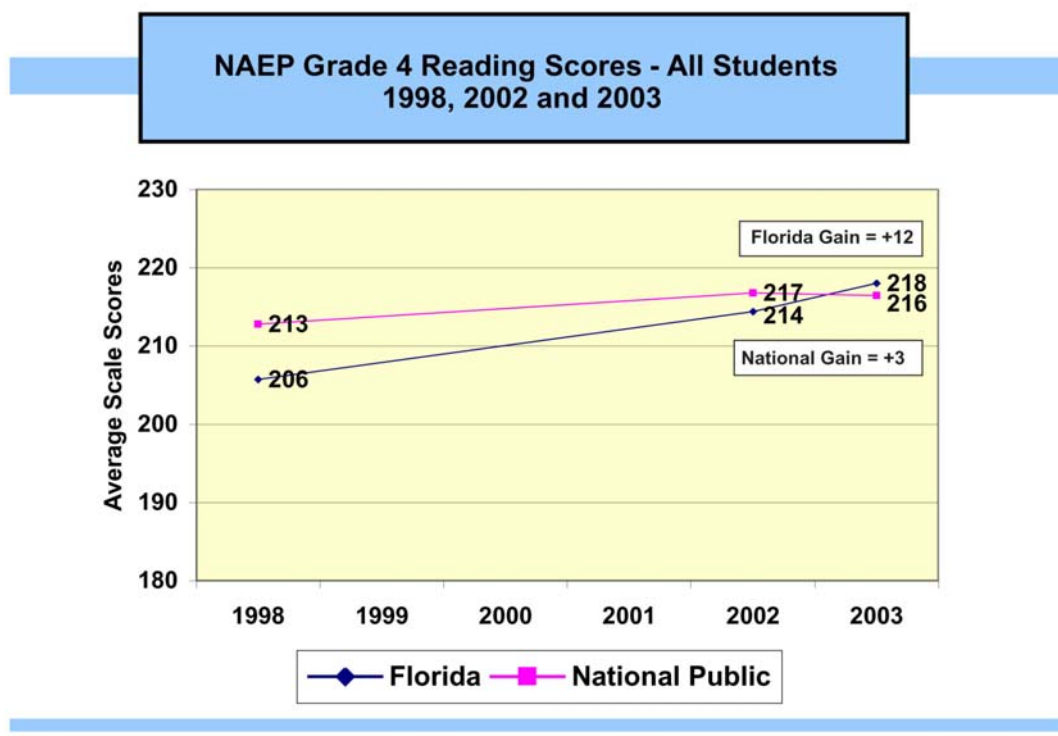
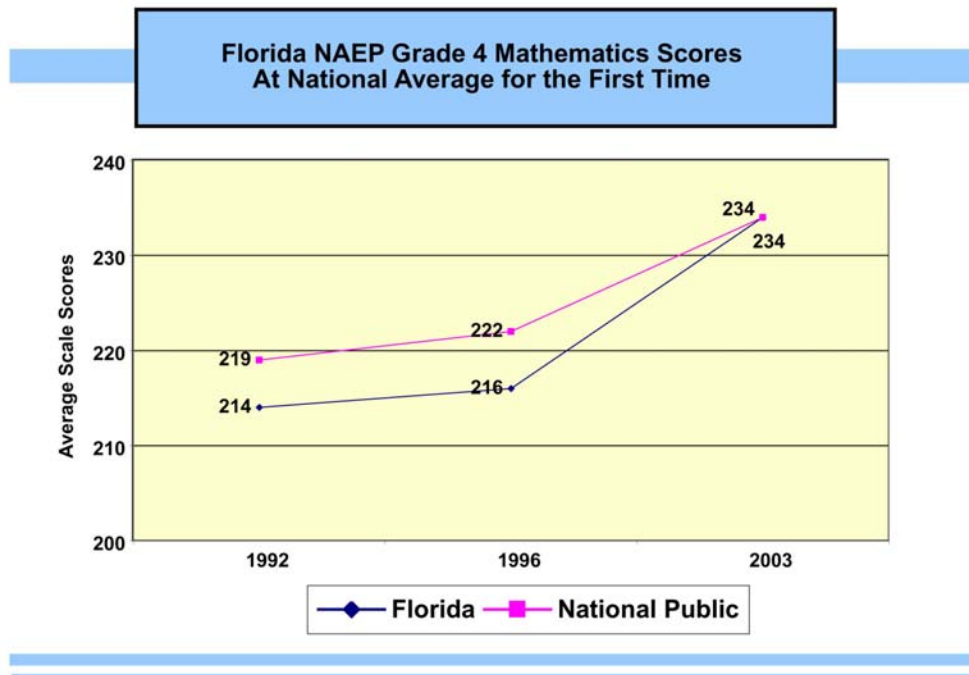


Figure 18



For more information: <http://fln.education.state.fl.us/naep/home.htm>

Principle #2:
Florida is holding the school system accountable.

- Florida has a strong accountability system based on high standards and rigorous assessments. The system applies to all public elementary and secondary schools and includes all public school students. Florida holds all students to high academic content standards.

Florida's Sunshine State Standards provide high expectations for student achievement.

In May 1996, the Florida State Board of Education approved the *Sunshine State Standards* (SSS) specifying challenging expectations for the educational achievement of Florida students in seven content areas including reading, writing, science, and mathematics. In January 1998, the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) was administered for the first time to students at selected grade levels to measure achievement of the SSS in reading and mathematics. The FCAT has been administered each spring (February for writing and March for reading and mathematics) since 1998 to assess students in selected grade levels in reading, writing, and mathematics. A science component was added to the program in 2003. FCAT is a program that includes both state-developed criterion-referenced assessments and a commercially-available national norm-referenced test (at this time, it is the Stanford 10® published by Harcourt Assessment, Inc.). The FCAT is an assessment of student achievement of the *Sunshine State Standards* for reading, writing, mathematics, and science.

Florida assesses and reports on the progress of all students in grades 3-11.

In addition to the FCAT reading and mathematics tests administered in grades 3-10, the science and writing tests are administered at selected grade levels, once each in elementary, middle and high school (see figure 19).

Figure 19
FCAT 2005 Administration

Grade	Subjects			
	Reading	Writing	Mathematics	Science
3	●		●	
4	●	●	●	
5	●		●	●
6	●		●	
7	●		●	
8	●	●	●	●
9	●		●	
10	●	●	●	
11				●

For more information: <http://www.firn.edu/doe/sas/fcat/pdf/fc04designsummary.pdf>

Student achievement on FCAT reading and mathematics is reported using scale scores, vertical scale scores, growth scores, content scores, achievement level classifications, passing score status, and statewide comparisons by statewide thirds. Total scores are placed on a 100-500 scale and reported along with standard error confidence interval information. All grades and subjects are reported on the 100-500 scale, and the achievement level classifications are also based on this scale. Beginning with the 2002 administration, FCAT total scores for reading and mathematics were also reported in terms of a new developmental (vertical) scale that provided for reporting growth continuously from grades 3 to 10.

For each administration, Florida reports additional summary statistics for each school and district and the state by disaggregated characteristics such as racial/ethnic group, gender and other demographic information. Specifically, on the FCAT demographic report, student performance is reported by the following categories: White, Black, Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander, American Indian/Alaskan, Multiracial/Ethnic, Unreported Race/Ethnicity, Female, Male, Unreported Gender, Standard Curriculum, LEP, Migrant, Section 504, Free/Reduced Lunch, Not Free/Reduced Lunch, All ESE Other Than Gifted, Not ESE Plus Gifted, and various disability categories. For more information:

<http://www.fcatsresults.com/demog/>

Ensuring English Language Learners are Developing English Proficiency—Florida is committed to ensuring the achievement of all of its students, especially its large population of English language learners (ELLs). Our commitment to these students is so important that Florida has worked for two years to develop and implement an assessment system that will provide a clear picture of English proficiency development and will also provide a mechanism for school and program accountability. Florida chose to develop a new assessment because the available instruments were not adequate for this important task. Florida's new assessment system will lead to higher student achievement for ELLs and more accountability for schools.

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 set forth state accountability requirements for the achievement of all students. In particular, Title I, Part A, and Title III of the No Child Left Behind Act require states to provide for the annual assessment of English proficiency of all ELLs in schools served by the local education agencies (LEAs). Published assessment instruments that adequately meet these requirements have not been available to states; therefore, the USED funded several consortia to develop instruments to meet this need. Florida participated in one of these consortia along with Maryland, Michigan, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Accountability Works (Education Leadership Council), and ETS. The grant funding supported the 2004-05 development and field test activities. Florida will implement this assessment beginning in 2005-06.

The Comprehensive English Language Learner's Assessment (CELLA) will provide the state a single, valid and reliable instrument to measure the attainment of English proficiency and growth in English proficiency. The Florida Department of Education plans to use CELLA in the following manner. The first administration of CELLA will be in the spring of 2005-06 and the second administration in the spring of 2006-07. These first two administrations will allow the Department to establish targets for English language proficiency and annual measurable achievement objectives (AMAOs). In the spring of 2006-07, and thereafter in the spring, one form of the test will be used for the statewide administration of CELLA to report progress on the attainment of English language proficiency and the AMAOs. Using CELLA, the Department will be able track the achievement and progress of all ELLs. Additionally, data from the assessment will be used to ensure that all schools and school districts are implementing effective instructional programs that help ELLs students develop English Proficiency.

Florida is revising its standards for students with significant cognitive disabilities to ensure access points within the Sunshine State Standards.

Florida's alternate assessment development activities began in 1994 in response to *Florida's System of School Improvement and Accountability (Blueprint 2000)*, a comprehensive school reform package that included a focus on student performance. The Department—in concert with Disabilities Research Systems, Inc., school district staff, teachers, and parents—developed, piloted, and implemented the *Performance Assessment System for Students with Disabilities (PASSD)* in eight school districts over a period of three years. A monitoring system for fidelity of implementation was designed and implemented.

In response to the 1997 reauthorization of IDEA, Florida expanded the use of PASSD and other district selected alternate assessments. At this same time, the Sunshine State Standards for Special Diplomas underwent revision to insure alignment with the broader Sunshine State Standards and to raise expectations for students with disabilities. The need to insure standards-based assessment required districts selecting assessments other than PASSD to submit documentation of correlation between the selected assessment and the content standards. Districts were monitored for implementation and reported assessment results to the Department.

In 2000, the need to aggregate results statewide resulted in the development of the Florida Alternate Assessment Report (FAAR). The FAAR includes grade level indicators for students with disabilities assessed through an alternate assessment. Rubrics are used by teachers to report on student progress toward mastery of standards based on locally selected alternate assessments. Indicators are tied to benchmarks and course performance standards at each grade level. Development of the indicators was a systematic effort that included educators and assessment specialists. Indicators have been developed for reading, mathematics, writing, and science.

Based on ten years of experience with alternate assessment, its issues and challenges, Florida is moving toward a statewide assessment for students with significant cognitive disabilities based on content standards. Input provided by key stakeholders has supported increased access and expectations for students with disabilities while maintaining an accountability system that recognizes the individual needs of students with disabilities. In the first phase of standards revision, writing teams are scheduled to develop access points for students with significant cognitive disabilities within the Sunshine State Standards.

Florida does not have an alternate assessment aligned to grade-level achievement standards. Students are assessed on grade-level achievement standards via FCAT. Students with disabilities and limited English proficiency are provided appropriate accommodations during testing as described in State Board of Education Rules. For more information: www.firn.edu/doe/commhome/fcatasd.htm (regarding accommodation for students with disabilities); and www.firn.edu/doe/omsle/omspubpg.htm (regarding limited English proficient students).

Florida's student participation rates are consistently at 96% or above.

Florida's participation rates are at 96% or above (see figure 20).

Figure 20
Florida's Student Participation Rates

2003-2004 School Year Assessment *	Total Number of Students Tested	Percent of Students Tested
All Students	1,592,151	98%
American Indian or Alaska Native	4,636	97%
Asian	32,525	98%
Black or African American	378,380	97%
Hispanic or Latino	346,943	97%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander		
White	796,531	98%
Students with Disabilities	251,129	96%
Limited English Proficient	151,495	98%
Economically Disadvantaged	749,326	97%
Migrant	20,003	97%
Male	816,554	97%
Female	775,597	98%

*Florida does not calculate the participation rate separately for reading and for mathematics. The information included in this table is the participation rate for reading and mathematics combined.

Florida's AYP definition is rigorous and comprehensive.

A Florida public school or district makes AYP if the following criteria are met:

Participation: At least 95% of all students enrolled in the public school participate in the state assessment program. Students must be tested using the FCAT or an appropriate alternate assessment for limited English proficient students (LEP) and students with disabilities (SWD). This requirement applies to all students and each subgroup.

Reading Proficiency: The state has set annual objectives for reading proficiency based on the ultimate goal to have 100% of all students proficient in reading by 2013-14. For 2003-04, the state objective was to have at least 31% of all students and each subgroup reading at or above grade level. For purposes of AYP determination, students scoring at Level 3 and above on the FCAT are considered proficient.

Math Proficiency: The state has also set annual objectives for math proficiency based on the ultimate goal to have 100% of all students proficient in math by 2013-14. For 2003-04, the state objective was to have at least 38% of all students and each subgroup scoring at or above grade level in math. For purposes of AYP determination, students scoring at Level 3 and above on the FCAT are considered proficient.

School Grade: The A+ School Grades are calculated prior to AYP. A school may not make AYP if it received a "D" or an "F".

Other Criteria: NCLB requires the state definition of AYP to include the graduation rate and at least one additional academic indicator as determined by the state. In Florida, the writing assessment is used as the additional indicator and school grades are used as an additional condition. Thus, in addition to the three criteria listed above, schools must meet two other criteria:

- **Improve performance in Writing by 1%:** All schools must demonstrate a 1% improvement in the percentage of students meeting state standards in writing. For purposes of AYP determination, students scoring 3 and above are meeting state standards. The writing target is also met if the school has a writing performance rate of 90% or better.
- **Improve the graduation rate by 1%:** High schools must demonstrate a 1% improvement in the graduation rate. The target is also met if a school attains a rate of 85% or better in the current year.

Safe Harbor: A school that has met the requirements for participation as well as the State's other indicators (writing, graduation rate, and school grade), but has not met the reading and/or mathematics proficiency targets can still make AYP through a provision in NCLB called Safe Harbor. Safe harbor applies only to those subgroups that did not meet the reading or mathematics targets.

In Safe Harbor, the percentage of non-proficient students must be decreased by at least 10% from the prior year in the subject being evaluated. In addition, the subgroup must make progress in writing proficiency and the graduation rate.

For more information: <http://web.fldoe.org/NCLB/pdf/0304ayp-tap.pdf>

Florida provides an AYP designation for all districts and schools, including small, specialized, and alternative schools.

Florida provides an AYP designation for all districts and schools consistent with our approved Accountability Plan.

Florida's four-year longitudinal graduation rate is disaggregated by student subgroups.

Graduation Rate—Florida accounts for every student and our graduation rate is on the rise.	1998-99 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 60.2% of all students ▪ 48.7% of African American students ▪ 52.8% of Hispanic students 	2003-04 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 71.6% of all students ▪ 57.3% of African American students ▪ 64.0% of Hispanic students
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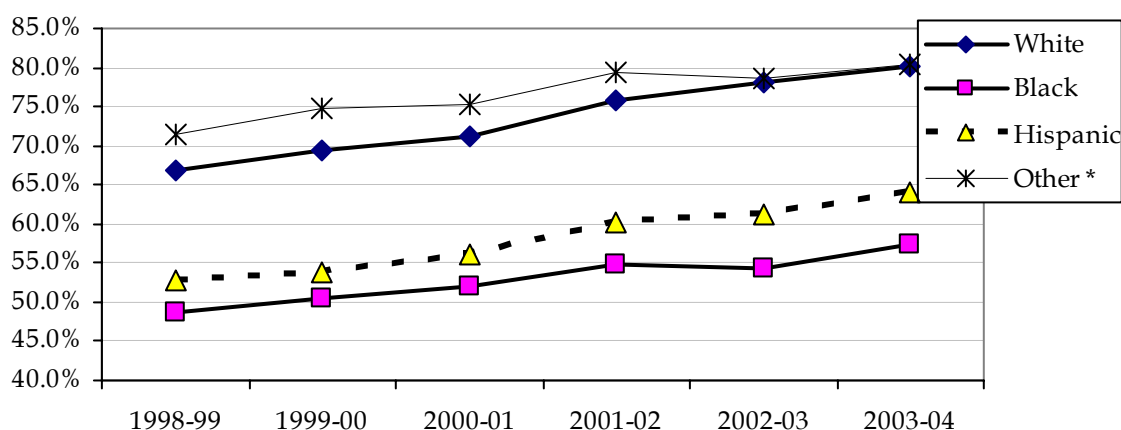
From 1998-99 onward, students in Florida's public schools have graduated at progressively higher rates while higher standards have been implemented. The class of 2002-03 was Florida's first graduating class for whom a passing score on the tenth grade Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) was a requirement for graduation. (The FCAT is set at a higher skill level than Florida's previous graduation exam, the High School Competency Test.)

In concert with rising graduation rates, dropout rates in Florida's high schools have declined year after year since 1998-99: from 5.4% in 1998-99 to 2.9% in 2003-04.

Improvement for All Racial/Ethnic Groups—Not only have rates improved for the overall population, they have improved for every racial/ethnic group during the period from 1998-99 to 2003-04, the latest year for which complete results are available (see figure 21).

Figure 21

Florida High School Graduation Rates by Race, 1998-99 to 2003-04

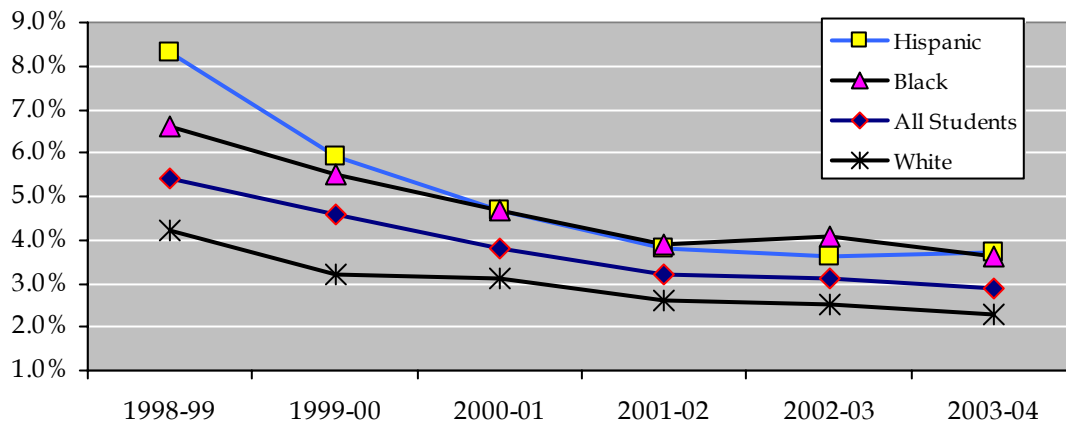


* "Other" combines Asian, American Indian, and multi-racial students.

	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian	Am. Indian	Multiracial	Total
1998-99	66.9%	48.7%	52.8%	73.4%	61.7%	64.7%	60.2%
1999-00	69.4%	50.6%	53.7%	77.4%	65.1%	64.8%	62.3%
2000-01	71.2%	51.9%	56.0%	77.5%	68.8%	68.4%	63.8%
2001-02	75.9%	54.9%	60.1%	82.0%	70.0%	74.1%	67.9%
2002-03	78.1%	54.2%	61.1%	81.0%	72.1%	73.8%	69.0%
2003-04	80.1%	57.3%	64.0%	82.3%	73.2%	78.1%	71.6%

Reduction of the Achievement Gap in Florida's Dropout Rates—During the past six years, Florida's dropout rate was lower each year when compared to the previous year: 1998-99: 5.4%; 1999-00: 4.6%; 2000-01: 3.8%; 2001-02: 3.2%; 2002-03: 3.1%; 2003-04: 2.9%. During this same period, the dropout rate for Hispanic students declined from 8.3% to 3.7%, and the dropout rate for African American students declined from 6.6% to 3.6%. These were the leading dropout rate declines among all ethnic groups for the time span indicated (see figure 22).

Figure 22
Dropout Rate Trends for Florida's Largest Ethnic Groups



Statewide Dropout Rates by Race/Ethnicity, Florida							
Ethnic Group	1998-99	1999-00	2000-01	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04	% Change from 98-99
Am. Indian	4.8	3.7	3.1	2.5	2.8	2.9	-1.9
Asian	2.8	2.2	2.1	1.7	1.8	1.6	-1.2
Black	6.6	5.5	4.7	3.9	4.1	3.6	-3.0
Hispanic	8.3	5.9	4.7	3.8	3.6	3.7	-4.6
Multiracial	4.2	3.7	3.0	2.2	2.2	2.2	-2.0
White	4.2	3.2	3.1	2.6	2.5	2.3	-1.9
Total	5.4	4.6	3.8	3.2	3.1	2.9	-2.5

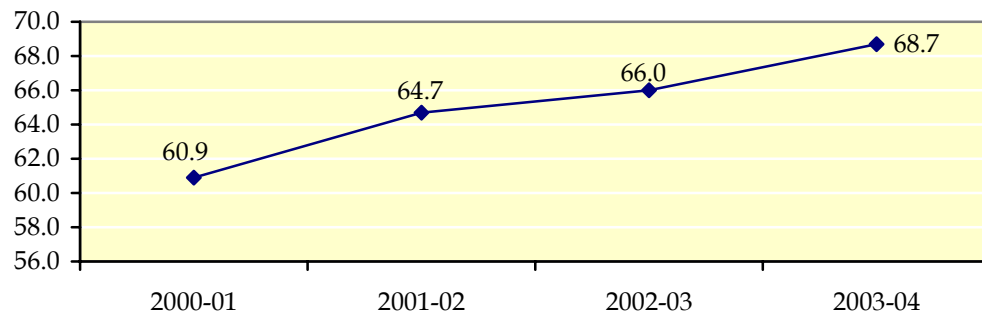
Dramatic Improvement in Graduation Rates for ESE Students—Florida's students with disabilities have continued to show notable improvement in successfully completing requirements of their individualized education plans (IEPs) (see figure 23).

Figure 23
Florida's Calculation of ESE Graduation Rates*
* Includes special diploma recipients as graduates.

	1998-99	1999-00	2000-01	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04
ESE (minus Gifted)	41.1%	42.5%	56.0%	48.7%	55.5%	64.1%
Total 9-12 Population	60.2%	62.3%	63.8%	67.9%	69.0%	71.6%

Continuous Improvement in Florida's NCLB Graduation Rates for All Groups—Florida's NCLB graduation rates* have likewise increased for the state's overall high school population (see figure 24) and for students of every subgroup from 2000-01 to 2003-04 (see figure 25).

Figure 24
Florida's Statewide NCLB High School Graduation Rate



* Florida's NCLB rate excludes adult GED diploma recipients and counts special diploma recipients as non-graduates.

Figure 25
Amount of Increase in NCLB Graduation Rates by Subgroup, 2000-01 to 2003-04

White	Black	Hispanic	Asian	Am. Indian	Multiracial
+ 8.9%	+ 5.1%	+ 7.8%	+ 4.5%	+ 6.6%	+ 11.2%

FRPL*	ESE**	LEP	Migrant	ALL
+ 5.7%	+ 9.6%	+ 3.9%	+ 8.0%	+ 7.8%

* Students eligible for free/reduced-price lunch (economically disadvantaged students).

** Students with disabilities.

Principle #3:
Florida ensures information is accessible and options are available.

- Florida strongly supports the role of parents in education and their need to have easily accessible and understandable student and school information. As a national leader, Florida provides parents with access to many educational options. While NCLB requires public school choice and supplemental educational services for schools receiving Title I funds, choice is universal under Florida's A+ system.

Florida has an easy-to-understand explanation of how AYP and Florida's A+ Plan work together as a whole.

Florida's A+ Plan and the requirements of AYP have complementary objectives, ensuring that all of Florida's students have the opportunity to benefit from school improvement. While the A+ Plan measures improvement in the total tested school population through learning gains on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT), and provides choice options for students in both Title 1 and non-Title 1 schools that are low-performing, AYP measures improvement of students in each of nine NCLB subgroups through a combination of performance indicators (including FCAT and the graduation rate, among others), with choice options for students at low-performing Title 1 schools.

Both the state and federal laws evaluate how well students have mastered the Sunshine State Standards—the skills Florida's teachers determined our children must learn at each grade level—which are measured by the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT). School Grades, assigned under the A+ Plan are based on: how well students are doing, how much progress they are making (learning gains), and how much progress struggling readers are making (since reading is essential to success in all subject areas). NCLB requires each student subgroup (all ethnic groups, students with disabilities, students learning English, and economically disadvantaged students) in schools, districts, and the state as a whole to make adequate yearly progress (AYP) in reading, mathematics, writing, and graduation rate. Schools that do not make enough progress in each area for two years in a row are in need of improvement, and must use those funds to provide alternatives to parents - such as transferring to another school or participating in a different program within the school. Schools that need improvement two years in a row (do not make AYP for three consecutive years) must provide tutoring to their low income students through Supplemental Educational Services.

Although both elements share the same goal of high achievement for all students, the rules by which the two laws measure progress toward the goal differ somewhat. The A+ Plan evaluates schools by taking a moving picture of student achievement, using a combination of current student performance along with the amount of improvement in learning from one year to another. NCLB uses a one-time snapshot of student achievement, which produces a different, and, in some ways, less complete picture of school performance.

NCLB's AYP measurement identifies specific sub-groups that need improvement. In addition to requiring reporting on aggregate data for all students, NCLB requires achievement data that must be reported

separately for economically disadvantaged students, limited English proficient students, students with disabilities, and each major racial and ethnic group (Black, White, Hispanic, Asian, and American Indian). NCLB requires schools to ensure that 95% of the student body and each subgroup take the state tests. Florida's A+ Plan gauges the overall quality of the school's effort in improving student achievement. These basic differences may result in a number of the A, B, or C-graded schools under the A+ Plan, being labeled as "in need of improvement" under the NCLB. Schools and the public should interpret the new "in need of improvement" label not so much as a failure on the part of any of the state's schools, but as an additional piece of information representing a considerably different perspective on how to use FCAT scores to judge schools. NCLB introduces new ratings and labels that can be used to complement, supplement, and enhance the more established and comprehensive A+ Plan.

Detailed information on the A+ Plan's procedures for school grading is available at <http://fln.education.net/doe/schoolgrades/pdf/guide04.pdf>. Detailed information on Florida's AYP calculation is available at <http://web.fldoe.org/NCLB/pdf/0304ayp-tap.pdf>.

Florida's report cards are easy to understand and easy to find on the Department's website.

School Report Card—Last year the Department released a new report card designed to provide parents with information on school performance (see figure 26). The report card, which parents can access online, provides the school's grade under the A+ Plan for Education, information on which areas may need improvement under the Federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act and where to go for information on options available to parents. The report card also contains information showing how student performance relates to money spent at the school-level, also known as return on investment (ROI). The school report cards can be located at: <http://schoolgrades.fldoe.org/>.

School grades range from A to F based on a point system. The scale is used primarily to help parents understand where their school falls using a traditional grading scale.

A = 410 and above
B = 380-409
C = 320-379
D = 280-319
F = Less than 280

NCLB School Public Accountability Reports—The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) School Public Accountability Reports (SPARs) contain several types of data (indicators) that provide required information on the progress of Florida's public schools. Reports from 2002-03 onward can be accessed online at <http://doeweb-prd.doe.state.fl.us/eds/nclbpar/index.cfm>. In addition, Florida's school districts are required to notify parents of the availability of the reports, which are released prior to the beginning of each school year. Parents may obtain printed copies of the reports from local schools and school board offices.

The NCLB SPAR website also includes a convenient link to AYP reports for schools, districts, and the state (<http://web.fldoe.org/NCLB/default.cfm>). The NCLB SPARs meet the public reporting requirements of the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act and include certain additional data that may be of interest to citizens, policy makers, and researchers. With a unique report prepared for each of 3,500+ schools statewide, the NCLB SPAR replaces the School Advisory Council Report as the standard annual school report for distribution to parents. (School Advisory Council Reports for 2001-02 and earlier can be accessed online at http://info.doe.state.fl.us/school_reports.) Additional information on the NCLB SPARs is available at <http://www.fln.edu/doe/eias/eiaspubs/pdf/nclbpar.pdf>.

Figure 26
Sample – Annual Report Card 2004



Annual Report Card 2004

YOUR CHILD'S EDUCATION: IN FLORIDA, IT'S PERSONAL

MADISON MIDDLE SCHOOL (2651), Hillsborough (29)

4444 W BAY VISTA AVE, TAMPA, FL 33611-1126

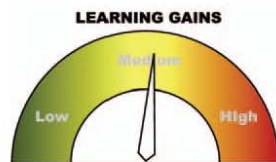
School Phone: 813-272-3050, Principal: KATHLEEN HOFFMAN

Title I** Status: School wide

Subject	State of Florida A+ Plan	Federal No Child Left Behind Act
School Grade	B	The Federal law evaluates performance by subgroups (such as ethnic background, economic disadvantage, and disability). It identifies specific areas needing improvement. Even an A school may need improvement in one area or another, just as even an honor roll student might need to improve certain skills.
Reading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 45% of students reading at or above grade level • 60% of students making a year's worth of progress in reading • 62% of struggling students making a year's worth of progress in reading 	Students with Disabilities, Hispanic and limited English proficient students in this school need improvement in Reading.
Math	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 53% of students at or above grade level in math • 69% of students making a year's worth of progress in math 	Students with Disabilities, African American, Hispanic and limited English proficient students in this school need improvement in Math.
Writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 96% of students are meeting state standards in writing 	African American students in this school need improvement in Writing.
Options for Parents	Your child is not eligible for an opportunity scholarship under the A+ Plan. Contact your district office at 813-272-4050 for other choice options available to you.	MADISON MIDDLE SCHOOL has not met federal adequate yearly progress under No Child Left Behind because it needs improvement in one or more areas. Your student may be eligible for school choice options under No Child Left Behind. Please contact your district office at (813-272-4050) for choices available to you.

**Title I refers to the federal law that provides funding for low-income students. A school is considered Title I when at least 35% (targeted assistance) or 50% (school wide) of its students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch based on their families' income levels.

School Efficiency Indicator for 2001-02 relates money spent at the school-level with student performance at that school allowing users to evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness compared to other schools.



This school is in the middle third of all middle schools on percent of students making learning gains.



This school is in the middle third of all middle schools in the district on money spent in this school.

State Law – Florida's A+ Plan, School Grades: School Grades are based on how well students have mastered the Sunshine State Standards – the skills Florida teachers determined our children must learn at each grade level – which are measured by the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT). Student scores are classified into five achievement levels, with 1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest. Schools earn points based on three things: how well students are doing, how much progress they are making (learning gains), and how much progress struggling readers are making (since reading is essential to success in all subject areas).

Federal Law – No Child Left Behind Act: requires each subgroup (all ethnic groups, students with disabilities, students learning English, and economically disadvantaged students) in schools, districts, and the state as a whole to make adequate yearly progress (AYP) in reading, mathematics, writing, and graduation rate. Schools that do not make enough progress for two years in a row are in need of improvement, and must provide alternatives to parents – such as transferring to another school or participating in a different program within the school. Schools that need improvement two years in a row (do not make AYP for 3 consecutive years) must provide tutoring.

Staying informed as a parent:

For additional information on school grades, adequate yearly progress, and school choice options, please visit the Department of Education's website at www.fldoe.org or call 1-800-447-1636.

Information on all schools – including which groups of students need to make more progress under federal guidelines – is also available at www.schoolresults.org.

Some questions and resources for parents:

Is your child being challenged at his or her school?
Has your child's school given and explained your child's grades and test results?
Have you asked your child's teacher if your child is on grade level in math and reading?
Have you asked for a specific list of skills your child needs to learn?

Information on the Sunshine State Standards is available at www.fldoe.org.

Have you talked with your child's teacher about his or her progress?
Have you asked specific questions about your child's reading ability and needs?
How can you help your child become a better reader?

Helpful information is available at www.justreadflorida.com or www.justreadfamilies.org.

Is your child on track for graduation?
Is your child on track for being prepared for college?
If not, what needs to be done?

Speak to his/her guidance counselor and register on-line to track his/her progress at www.facts.org.

Florida School Indicators Report—The Department provides access to information beyond mandated reporting requirements. The Florida School Indicators Report (<http://info.doe.state.fl.us/fsir/>) is an on-line interactive resource providing data on each elementary, middle, and high school in Florida's 67 school districts. This comprehensive report is a key source of information for measuring school performance and assessing other important characteristics of students' educational environment. The report's on-line database currently contains data for seven school years (1997-98 through 2003-04).

Parents can use the report to compare performance among schools in their district and measure how well schools are achieving improvement plan goals. Parents who are relocating to Florida or who are investigating other school choice options can refer to a school's test results, special program data, statistics on disciplinary actions, and other data. Additional information on this online resource is available at <http://www.firn.edu/doe/eias/eiaspubs/pdf/fsirfin.pdf>.

Florida schools are identified for improvement before the beginning of the school year.

Last year, both school grades and AYP designations were announced June 15, 2004. Even with four hurricanes, Florida anticipates releasing school grades and AYP designations around the same time. Schools are identified for improvement, even after appeals, before the beginning of the next school year. Last year's release: http://www.fldoe.org/news/2004/2004_06_15-2.asp.

Florida's providers of supplemental educational services are available in urban and rural areas, available for special education and limited English proficient students, and are rigorously evaluated.

In an effort to have a diverse pool of providers for parents to choose from, the Florida Department of Education has had four rounds of the application process for prospective applicants. Florida will have approximately 175 SES providers for the 2005-06 school year, and there will be an adequate number of providers which include community and faith-based groups who are available in urban and rural areas and for special education and limited English proficient students. Providers' programs must be of high quality, research-based, and specifically designed to increase the achievement of eligible children in attaining proficiency to meet Florida's Sunshine State Standards.

The Florida Department of Education, in cooperation with school districts, is required to monitor and evaluate the quality and effectiveness of services offered by state-approved providers. The Department is required to withdraw approval from providers that fail, for two consecutive years, to contribute to increasing the academic proficiency of students to whom they provide services or that fail to meet any of the other eligibility requirements or assurances (see P.L. 107-110 Section 1116(e)(4)(D)).

In order to fulfill these requirements, the Department has established four components to its Accountability Plan: 1) the identification of key accountability indicators, 2) a monitoring plan, 3) an evaluation plan, and 4) a plan to provide accountability reports for current providers. For more information: <http://www.firn.edu/doe/family/ses.htm>

Florida's school districts are implementing supplemental service, ensuring easy parental access to all state-approved providers.

This was Florida's first year of implementation, involving 11 of the 67 school districts and 39 schools. Each of the districts submitted an SES Implementation Plan to the state by July 1, 2004. The Florida Department of Education's SES website provided easy access for districts and parents to the Provider Directory, which described each provider's program. The FLDOE developed a Tool Kit for districts that provided access to templates for agreements, contracts, flyers, parent letters, and other tools enabling each district to implement a successful SES program in the first year of implementation. It is felt that the 11 school districts implemented SES in good faith and ensured that eligible parents had access to providers who served their districts. For more information: http://sip.osi.fsu.edu/SES/Login_SES.aspx

Florida is working with its districts to expand capacity for public school choice.

Florida's Implementation of School Choice goes above and beyond NCLB requirements, applying its A+ Plan in conjunction with NCLB to cover non-Title I schools as well as Title I schools in providing choice options.

Objectives of Florida's Implementation of NCLB School Choice:

1. Improve student achievement;
2. Create more meaningful school choice options for more parents by providing additional choices; and
3. Provide more highly qualified teachers and programs to low-performing students.

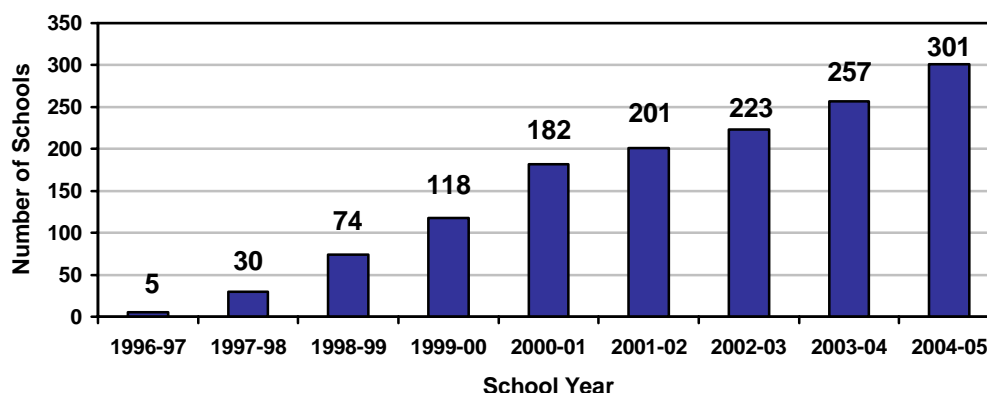
In the event that the required set aside funds would not cover the costs of choice for all students, prior to offering choice, school districts (LEAs) prioritize students based on poverty status and student performance.

Florida's Five Genuine NCLB Choice Options:

1. Choice with transportation from a school in need of improvement to a school not identified as in need of improvement or a non-Title I school that does not have the following combination of school performance grades for the previous two years: DD; DF; FD; or FF. (This is a required option for students attending schools in need of improvement.)
2. Supplemental Educational Services (extended day services) provided by state-approved providers (a required option for students on free or reduced-price lunch attending schools in need of improvement for the second consecutive year).
3. Option for parents to choose for their child to remain at the school previously chosen through Florida's Choice options. These options include: controlled open enrollment, developmental research schools, charter schools, charter technical career centers, New World School of the Arts, Florida School for the Deaf and the Blind, the Florida Virtual School, Opportunity Scholarships for students attending persistently failing schools, and the John M. McKay Scholarships for Students with Disabilities Program. Charter schools continue to grow as a viable choice for parents (see figure 27).

Figure 27

Growth in Florida's Charter Schools, 1996 - 2005



4. School-within-a-School Model Program (operates during the school day and provides quality programs and teachers to priority students) with the following requirements:
 - a) The program is different from programs previously provided to the student.
 - b) The program is provided in the core content areas.
 - c) The program is research-based.
 - d) The program is taught by quality instructors* who are different from students' previous instructors.

*Quality instructors are defined as those who (1) are certified in their area and level of assignment (certified in their content area and, if serving English Language Learners [ELL], endorsed in English for Speakers of Other Languages [ESOL], or, if serving Students with Disabilities [SWD], certified as a specialist in the applicable area of disability); and (2) meet one or more of the following criteria: (a) provide instruction in the applicable content area that results in greater than 1-year of student gain achievement, (b) are National Board Certified, (c) are Reading endorsed, (d) are certified as a Specialist in the content area, and/or (e) have greater than 5 years of teaching experience in the content area with annual evidence of student gains in the content area.

5. Supplemental Educational Services (extended day services) provided by a district-approved provider with the following requirement: Services are in the area(s) of reading, mathematics, and/or writing and are provided by quality instructors (as defined above).

Additionally, Florida "harnesses the power of technology" to document LEAs' implementation of school choice through two information collection systems. For information on LEAs' implementation of choice, the Florida Department of Education provides a web-based district (LEA) Choice Plan reporting tool that districts use to publish preliminary and final school choice options that parents can access prior to the first day of school. The preliminary plans include the district's plan for prioritizing students and the estimated number of prioritized students. Once the school year has begun, the final choice plan is available and provides the numbers of students served by each option. These plans are available to the public and include contact names, phone numbers, and email addresses for customers.

For collecting information on the number of students being served by each choice, the Florida Department of Education's (DOE) Automated Student Information System implemented a coding system beginning in the 2004-2005 school year. The data element *Educational Choice* is now a part of the Automated Student Database System and is designed for reporting information about the federal NCLB and state school choice options. Codes used in the *Educational Choice* element indicate the primary type of educational choice option that applies to a student's enrollment or to the student's choice for supplemental services.

Principle #4:
Florida is
improving the
quality of our
teachers.

- Florida continues to implement a rigorous system for ensuring teachers are highly qualified, and for making aggressive efforts to ensure that all children, beginning in the 2006-07 school year, are taught by highly qualified teachers.

Florida collects and accurately reports on the percentage of classes in public elementary, middle, and secondary schools taught by highly qualified teachers.

Florida reports the percentage of classes taught by highly qualified teachers on its annual Consolidated State Performance Report (CSPR) submitted to the U.S. Department of Education. In addition, Florida provides results for the number and percentage of classes not taught by highly qualified teachers at the school level via its annual NCLB Reports (<http://doeweb-prd.doe.state.fl.us/eds/nclbspar/index.cfm>), which are publicly released prior to the beginning of each school year. Accuracy of data is ensured through edit and validation rules applied to student course records reported by school districts to Florida's automated information database. Results from the 2003-04 CSPR are shown in the following table (see figure 28).

Figure 28

Percentage of Classes Taught by Highly Qualified Teachers

School Type	Total Number of Core Academic Classes	Number of Core Academic Classes Taught by Highly Qualified Teachers	Percentage of Core Academic Classes Taught by Highly Qualified Teachers
<i>All Schools in State</i>	574,476	511,055	89.0%
<i>By Poverty Status</i>			
High-Poverty Schools	107,790	93,978	87.2%
Low-Poverty Schools	148,106	134,848	91.0%
<i>By Level</i>			
Elementary	241,136	226,357	93.9%
Secondary	333,340	284,698	85.4%

Florida school district letters sent to parents of Title I students who are taught by teachers who are not highly qualified are accurate, easily understood, and provided in a timely manner.

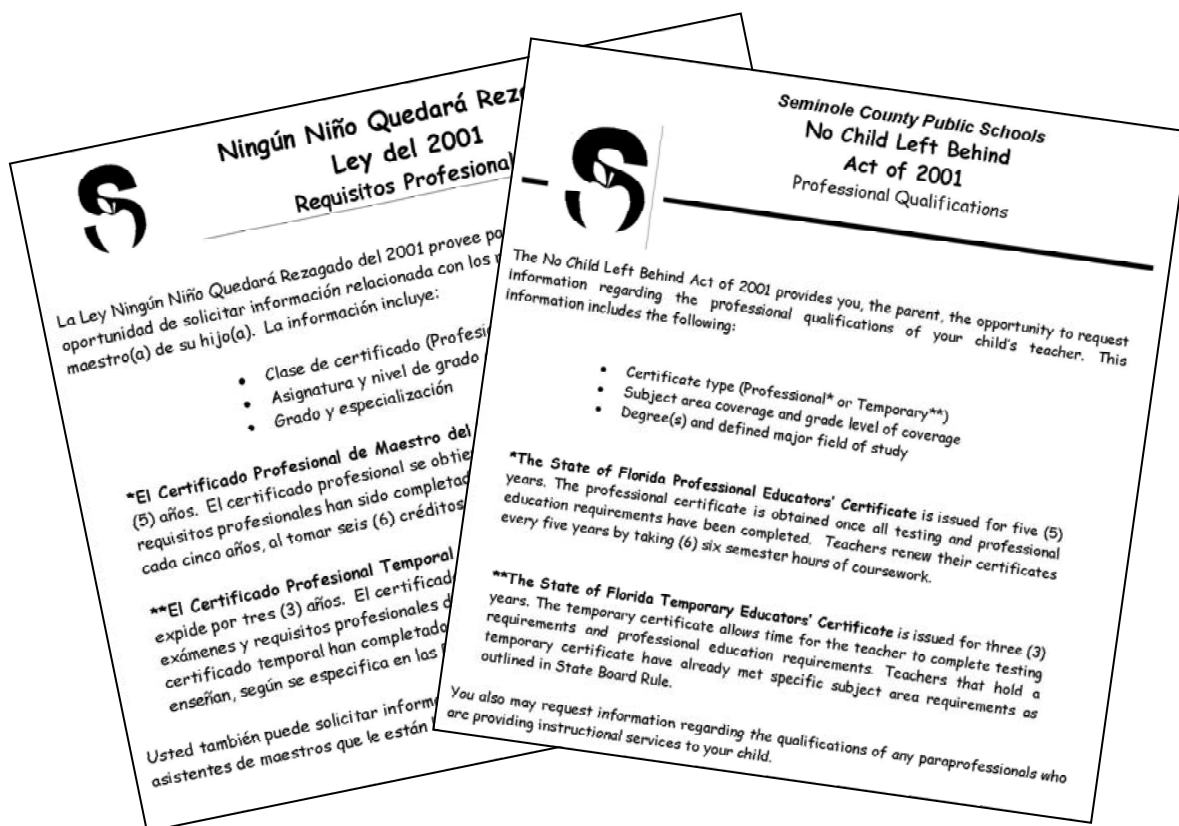
Section 1012.42, Florida Statutes, requires notification to parents of the assignment of teachers teaching subject areas who are considered out-of-field. Since 1990, Florida school districts have also been required to establish policies and implement procedures to ensure that all communication to parents is in a manner/language understood by the parent/guardian.

In the Title I, Part A LEA Plan, school districts were required to describe the policies and procedures adopted by the school district to implement Section 1119, NCLB. Florida's NCLB Consolidated Application (Appendix A) also described the required elements of the State Report Card which included the reporting of teachers who are teaching out-of-field.

In addition to individual letters of notification to parents sent by schools, the Department's public accountability reporting system, including the NCLB School Public Accountability Reports (SPARs), provides LEAs with downloadable files with data on the number of classes taught by teachers who are highly qualified and those taught by teachers who are not highly qualified. This information is used by school districts for reporting to parents on numerous indicators of student performance and on the provision of highly qualified staff.

Continuous guidance has been provided to school districts on these requirements including clarifying memoranda and technical assistance papers. A sample parent notification letter may be found by visiting Seminole County School District's Title I web page at www.scps.k12.fl.us/Title1/dsp/forms.cfm. An excerpt from the sample letter—provided both in English and Spanish—is included below (see figure 29).

Figure 29
Sample Parent Notification Letter in English and Spanish



Florida has assessments in place for elementary school teachers who are new to the profession to confirm that they know and are able to teach reading, writing, mathematics, and other areas of the elementary school curriculum.

Florida requires that teacher candidates pass a series of rigorous examinations prior to the issuance of certificates. They must not only demonstrate their general knowledge in reading, English/language arts (including a written essay), and mathematics, they also must pass an exam of pedagogy (professional education exam) and an exam in the area of their expertise and desired certification. In addition, the teacher certification exams are aligned to the State's curriculum standards for students, the Sunshine State Standards.

Elementary School Teachers seeking certification in the elementary grades must take a certification examination specific to the pre-kindergarten and/or elementary grades they seek to teach. The broadest certification area is Kindergarten-Grade 6. To be certified for these grades applicants must take the Kindergarten-Grade 6 Examination. The Kindergarten-Grade 6 Test consists of five sections: Science and Technology; Mathematics, Language Arts; Social Science and Visual Arts. Not only are the tests aligned to the state curriculum standards, the subject area knowledge assessed on the test was validated by committees of content specialists from within the state of Florida. A majority of the committee members were public school teachers, but the committees also included district supervisors and college faculty with expertise in these fields.

Although some pedagogical questions may appear on the examination, the primary focus is on subject area knowledge.

Florida requires teachers to demonstrate subject matter competency through measures that rigorously evaluate their subject matter knowledge and teaching skills in each core academic subject they teach.

One of the teacher certification examination requirements for a Florida teacher is passing an exam of subject area expertise. This examination is in addition to an examination of general knowledge in reading, English/language arts (including a written essay), and mathematics, and an exam of pedagogy (professional education exam). The teacher certification exams are aligned to the State's curriculum standards for students, the Sunshine State Standards.

The content included on the examinations used to test competency in subject areas for Florida educators is defined by a list of competencies and skills for each area. The emphasis in the subject area exams is on content area knowledge and skills. The competencies and skills are not only tied to subject matter content standards in the particular fields, but are also aligned with existing curriculum standards for students, the Florida Sunshine State Standards. Prospective teachers must also pass a General Competency Exam covering basic skills, and a Professional Education Test covering pedagogical skills.

Currently, the State of Florida maintains approximately fifty subject area examinations including core courses such as math, chemistry, physics, reading, history, earth sciences, computer sciences, and economics, as well as other elective and specialized subject areas including agriculture, marketing and visually impaired. A list of these exams is found in the Assessment and Accountability Briefing book on the DOE's website (<http://fln.education.state.fl.us/doe/sas/fcat/pdf/fcataabb.pdf>, pp. 39-40).

Florida has policies in place to ensure that poor and minority students are taught by highly qualified teachers as often as their more affluent peers.

Section 1012.231(2), Florida Statutes, specifies that school districts may not assign a higher percentage than the school district average of first-time teachers, temporarily certified teachers, teachers in need of improvement, or out-of-field teachers to schools with above the school district average of minority and economically disadvantaged students or schools that are graded "D" or "F." District school boards are authorized to provide salary incentives to meet this requirement. No district school board shall sign a collective bargaining agreement that fails to provide sufficient incentives to meet this requirement.

In addition to Florida law, Florida's NCLB Choice options, as described previously, include two choices for parents that document Florida's commitment to ensuring that poor and minority students are taught by highly qualified teachers: School within a School Model Program and District Approved Provider – Supplemental Education Services. Both program choices require the provision of quality instructors. Florida's definition of "quality instructors" in both of these choice options exceeds the requirements for highly qualified teachers set forth in NCLB.

In addition, school districts were required to submit a plan for prioritizing students. Guidance was provided to school districts on methods for prioritizing students, which included ranking of students by highest poverty level and lowest performing.

The 2004-05 Title I, Part A Project Application (web-based application) required LEAs to describe how the school district would ensure that minority and poverty students had equal access to rigorous academic instruction, taught by highly qualified staff. LEAs were also required to report measurable goals, objectives and strategies that address the requirements for ensuring students are taught by highly qualified staff. The 2004-05 On-Site Monitoring Protocol and Workpapers for Title I, Part A, require verification of comparable services to poverty students, including access to highly qualified teachers and paraprofessionals.

To assist school districts in recruiting high quality teachers, the Florida DOE sponsors several statewide activities:

State Improvement Grant—Florida is in the fourth year of a five year State Improvement Grant (SIG) awarded by the US Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs. The focus of the SIG is increasing the quantity and quality of special education teachers and related services personnel within the state. The percentage of special education teachers designated as meeting certification requirements for special education has increased from 85% to 89% since inception of the grant. The SIG also supports colleges and universities in improving the quality of pre-service programs. Currently, a group of colleges and universities have been provided "seed money" to develop innovative programs for secondary teachers to be highly qualified through certification in both a content area and in special education.

The Great Florida Teach-In—To be held June 22-23rd of this year at the Orange County Convention Center; last year 1,945 candidates from 49 states attended, with 775 jobs filled in Florida districts directly attributable to the Teach-In.

TeachinFlorida.com—Florida's official recruitment website offers applicants an opportunity to post resumes and districts the opportunity to post vacancies, and includes job fair information and links; the site also provides professional development notices and links, an online Teacher Toolkit of web resources

aligned to the Sunshine State Standards, and a section on promising practices in professional development systems.

Troops to Teachers and Spouses to Teachers—Florida supports these Federal programs which provide financial assistance and services to retired military personnel and spouses of service personnel who desire to teach in Florida. Florida's program has the third highest placement rate of any state.

Florida provides high quality, intensive and sustained professional development to all teachers so they can improve and expand their skills, knowledge, and success.

The 2000 Florida Legislature enacted new legislation to improve the quality of the professional development system for public education. The School Community Professional Development Act (F.S., 1012.98) requires the Department of Education to design methods by which school districts may evaluate and improve professional development systems. This evaluation must include annual assessment of data indicating progress or lack of progress of students and will result in identification of "best practices" and provision of targeted technical assistance.

The legislation is in alignment with the definition of high quality professional development outlined in NCLB and links professional development with student and instructional personnel needs as determined by school improvement plans, annual school reports, student achievement data, and performance appraisal data of teachers and administrators. Professional development activities focus primarily on subject content (especially reading) and teaching methods, classroom management, assessment and data analysis, family involvement and school safety.

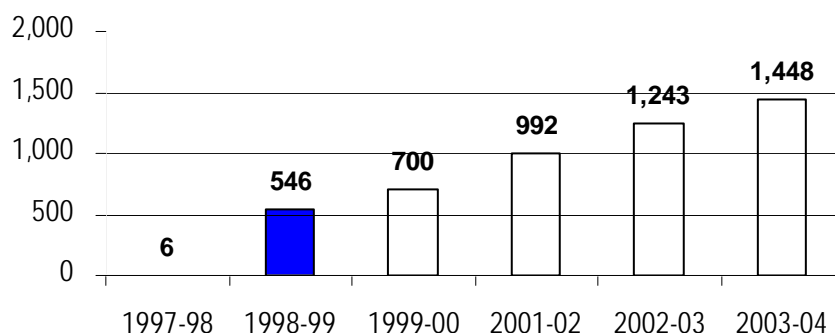
In addition, Florida implements a variety of activities designed to provide high quality professional development to all teachers:

Review of District Professional Development Systems—Florida leads the nation in establishing the protocol for professional development systems; currently completing the second year of a three-year review cycle for all school districts. Systems are evaluated on planning, delivery, evaluation and follow-up at the district, school and individual teacher levels. Noted deficiencies are revisited by districts and evaluators; highly rated components are recorded as promising practices for use by all school districts.

Initial and Continuing Approval of Teacher Preparation Degree Programs in Colleges and Universities—This process provides peer review and state oversight of teacher preparation programs offered in Florida colleges of education, to ensure that programs require graduates to demonstrate mastery of all state performance standards.

Dale Hickam Excellent Teaching Program—This program provides application scholarships and bonus awards to teachers completing National Board Certification (NBC); additional bonus money is provided to those NBC Teachers who also complete mentoring of other teachers in accordance with State Board rule. As a result of Florida's strong support of this program, we have seen dramatic increases in the numbers of teachers with NBC (see figure 30).

Figure 30
Annual Number of Teachers Certified by the
National Board for Professional
Teaching Standards



Teacher-to-Teacher E-learning—In Florida, each school district is responsible for approving professional development activities in accordance with its approved master Inservice Plan and the State's Protocol Standards for Professional Development. Several districts in the Panhandle Area Consortium have approved the use of these courses for professional development credit (MIP points) for their teachers. At this time, teachers in 22 school districts have registered for 752 E-learning courses.

Additional Web-based Resources—Tele-mentoring services are provided by accomplished veteran teachers on a request basis through TeachinFlorida.com; a new Virtual Teacher Center (January 2005) called Start with Success provides resources 24/7 for new teachers and substitute teachers on classroom management, curriculum, assessment, and instructional practices.

Educator Preparation Institutes—Statutory authority provided in 2004 for postsecondary institutions to provide teacher training in the areas of professional development for certified teachers, substitute teacher training, paraprofessional training, and alternative certification for bachelor's degree holders.

Florida's Sound Education Policies Go Above and Beyond the Principles of NCLB

Sound Education Policy: Above and Beyond the Principles of NCLB

- In addition to meeting the specific principles of NCLB, Florida continues to advance sound education policies that are designed to increase the achievement of all students in our state.

Florida's A+ Plan

In 1999, Florida set on a path to higher student achievement with the passage of the "A+ Plan." The major promise of the A+ Plan was that the state would hold schools accountable for the education of ALL students and that annual student learning progress would be measured. The plan was based on two principles:

1. Each student should gain a year's worth of knowledge in a year's time in a Florida public school; and
2. No student will be left behind.

Using these principles, a plan was built that focused on:

- Accountability
- Choices for Parents
- More resources
- Rewards for improvement and success
- Change when students are not progressing

While it has taken several years to fully develop the tools to implement the "A+ Plan," Florida now can boast a system that was built in the spirit of the new NCLB legislation. For example, a centerpiece of Florida's system is our assessment instrument that can measure how much a student learned from one year to the next. In fact, our school grades in Florida are based on a combination of the following three components:

- Student achievement scores,
- Annual learning gains, and
- Improvement of the lowest twenty-five (25) percent of students in reading in each grade, aggregated for each school, unless they are performing above satisfactory, defined as FCAT Achievement Levels 4 and 5."

Florida has moved beyond a status model of accountability to one that is capable of setting individual proficiency goals for each student, tracking and reporting progress, and using this information to drive instruction at the classroom level.

The two guiding principles of A+ Plan establish the framework for all other policies and programs that are implemented. To illustrate Florida's commitment to going above and beyond the policies of NCLB for the purpose of increased student achievement, several examples are provided in this section:

- Assistance Plus
- Scholarship Programs

- Just Read, Florida!
- Middle and High School Reform Efforts
- Return on Investment
- Sunshine Connections
- Alternate teaching certification programs and educator preparation institutes
- Voluntary Prekindergarten Program (VPK)
- Data Infrastructure Capabilities
- Outside Research Confirmation

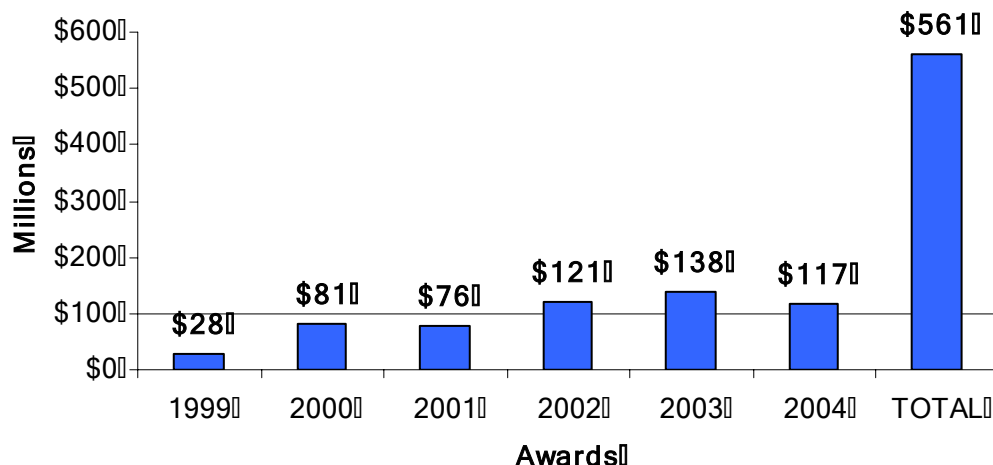
Assistance Plus

Florida's A+ School Accountability system rewards schools for improved student achievement and sanctions schools with grade F performance. Schools that earn a letter grade of A or improve at least one letter grade receive funds in the amount of \$100 per pupil. Since 1999, approximately \$561 million dollars have been provided to schools through the School Recognition Program (see figure 31). Districts that have schools that earn a letter grade of F are sanctioned by the State Board of Education and must agree to put into place improvement strategies that are defined annually in the State Board Approved Assistance Plus Plan.

ASSISTANCE *plus*

Figure 31

School Recognition Awards 1999 through 2004



Assistance Plus includes funded services and resources available to F schools. Funding provided as resources for improvement include:

- Resources and Professional Development to support the Continuous Improvement Model
- Mathematics and Reading Coach Funding
- Comprehensive School Reform Funding
- Title I School Improvement Funding
- Research-based reading program Funding
- 21st Century Learning Community Projects
- School Improvement staff and support

With the implementation of NCLB, Assistance Plus now includes schools in need of improvement and Florida's F schools. Governing Principles that guide the Assistance Plus efforts include the following:

- The District shall be held accountable for providing necessary resources to have all students performing at acceptable levels.
- The State shall provide expectations and necessary resources to enable districts to have all students performing at acceptable levels.
- The State Board of Education shall be prepared to take action in the event that districts are unsuccessful at having all students performing at acceptable levels.

Accountability and Compliance. Districts must implement district improvement and school assistance and intervention plans. Additional requirements of Florida districts that have low performing schools include: hiring quality school administrators and staff, including a special budget category for low performing schools, implementing policies to end social promotion, implementing Individual Student Success Plans for every student attending a low performing school, and closing repeating F charter schools.

Schools must implement school improvement plans. These plans must be submitted to the state for approval. Florida has implemented web-based tools for districts and schools to submit these plans. For the 2004-2005 year, 2,792 schools reported their school improvement plans into the database. These are available on the web and can be revised or amended for 2005-2006. For more information:

<http://schoolgrades.fldoe.org/pdf/assistplus-overview.pdf>

Scholarship Programs

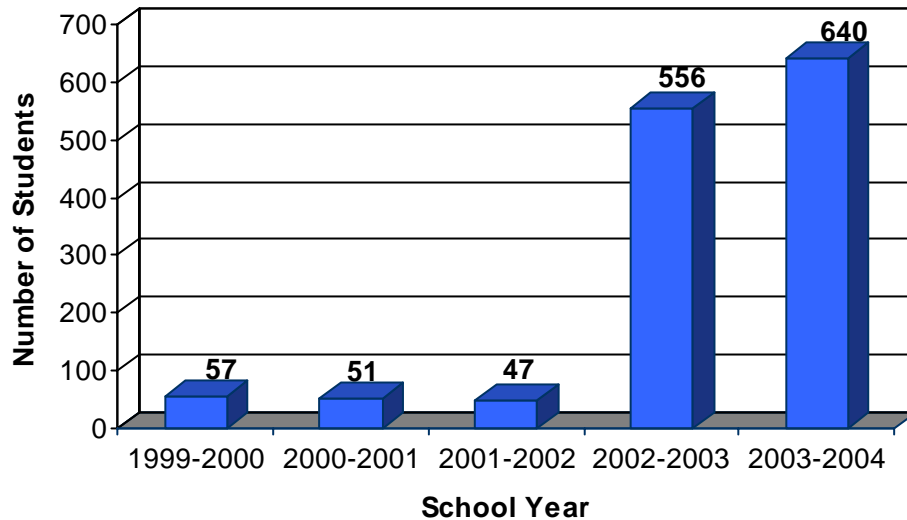
The A+ Plan places great emphasis on providing support and resources to schools that are not performing satisfactorily. However, when schools do not improve or when students are in need of special assistance, Florida provides families and children with additional opportunities. Currently, Florida has three options: the Opportunity Scholarship Program, the John M. McKay Scholarships for Students with Disabilities Program, and the Corporate Tax Credit Scholarship Program. All three options provide Florida's private schools with an opportunity to partner with the state to serve Florida's students. Florida's private schools have seized this opportunity—with over half of the 2,231 active private schools in 2003-04 participating in one or more of our scholarship programs.

To ensure that families have access to up-to-date information, Florida operates a school choice parent hotline, as well as a Florida School Choice Resource Center. The parent hotline is staffed by school choice specialists who are able to provide information on how parents register for choice options, private schools participating in choice options, and any other request for information or assistance. In addition, parents are encouraged to use the Resource Center to learn more about school choice, educational options, learning resources, FCAT, and NCLB. For more information: www.opportunityschools.org

The **Opportunity Scholarship Program** offers students who have attended or who are assigned to attend failing public schools with the option to attend a higher performing public school or a participating private school. Schools that have received a school grade of 'F' for two of the past four years are considered failing schools. This program continues to grow in numbers (see figure 32).

Figure 32

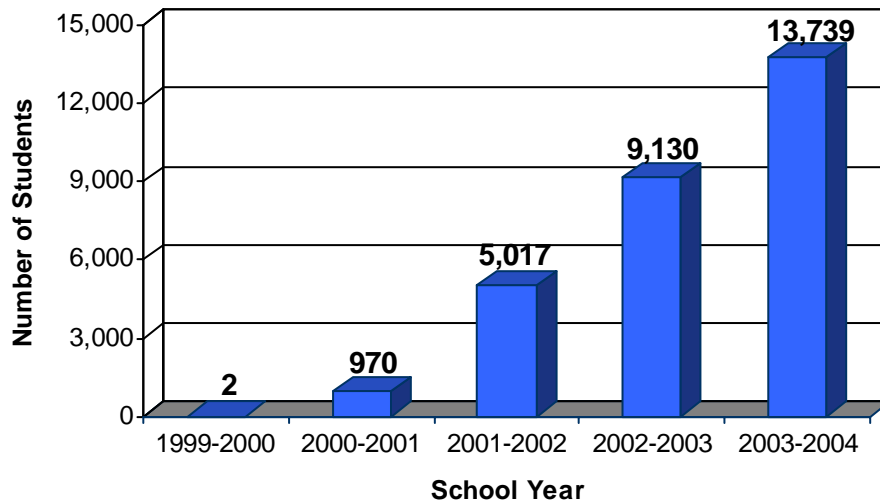
Students Participating in the Opportunity Scholarship Program



The John M. McKay Scholarships for Students with Disabilities Program allows parents of students with learning disabilities to choose the best academic environment for their child. If a student has an active/current Individual Education Plan (IEP), he or she may be eligible to attend another public school or receive funding to attend a participating private school. Each year, more students take advantage of this program (see figure 33).

Figure 33

Students Participating in the McKay Scholarship Program



The **Corporate Tax Credit Scholarship Program** offers students who qualify for the free and reduced lunch program the option to attend another public school and receive money for transportation or to attend a private school.

Just Read, Florida!



Governor Bush believes that reading is the most powerful skill a child can learn, as it influences success in school and improves the overall quality of life. Just Read, Florida! is Governor Jeb Bush's statewide reading initiative that prioritizes reading in Florida's public schools and among all the community groups and volunteer organizations that support them. Just Read, Florida! is based on the latest reading research as promoted by the National Reading Panel, and supported through the No Child Left Behind legislation, particularly the Reading First program.

Charged with establishing reading as a core value in this state, Just Read, Florida! was launched in 2001 with the unequivocal goal of every child being able to read at or above grade level by the year 2012. With that goal in mind, Just Read, Florida! focuses on three main components:

- Educator Training
- Parental Involvement
- Community and Corporate Engagement

Just Read, Florida! received national attention last year when the results of the National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP), also known as the "Nation's Report Card" proved Florida to be the only state in the nation to show significant improvement in 4th grade reading. Also, the recently released Education Trust report shows Florida's 15 point gain in reading at 4th grade is more than twice that of the closest state.

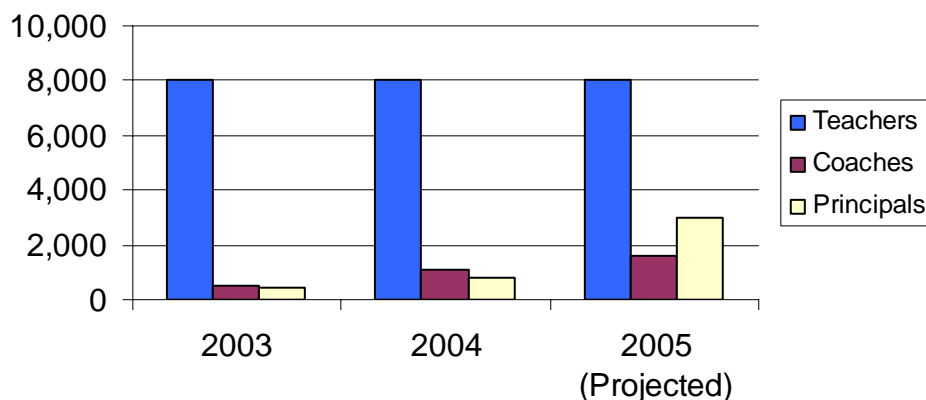
Since 2002, Just Read, Florida! has accomplished the following:

- Along with Alabama and Colorado, Florida was the first in the nation to receive a federal Reading First grant, which will mean \$300 million dollars for K-3 reading instruction in our state.
- Florida was invited to send a team to Harvard Graduate School of Education in August of 2002 to share Just Read, Florida! with five other states.
- Over 16,000 K-3 teachers trained in research-based reading instruction.
- Over 1600 Elementary and Middle School Principals trained in research-based reading instruction, and in how to make reading the priority at school.
- Over 1500 K-12 Reading Coaches trained in research based reading instruction.
- Over \$58 million dollars to fund and train reading coaches for schools.
- Over 20,000 parents of K-3 students were trained in how to support reading instruction at home.

By the end of summer 2005, 3000 reading coaches, 95% of K-12 principals, and 66% of K-3 teachers will have received training (see figure 34).

Figure 34

**Reading Coaches, Principals and K-3 Teachers
Trained by Just Read, Florida!**



Middle and High School Reform Initiatives

Middle School Reform Efforts. Governor Bush championed efforts to begin the systematic reform of Florida's middle schools during the 2004 Legislative session. The 2004 Legislature passed the Middle Schools Reform Act, which was the first step to better posture our middle schools to leave no child behind. The purpose of the Act was to provide focus and rigor to academics in the middle grades. It was the intent of the Legislature that students promoted from the eighth grade would be ready for success in high school. The Department conducted a study on how the overall academic performance of middle grade students and schools could be improved and submitted recommendations to the President of the Senate, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, the chairs of the education committees in the Senate and the House of Representatives, and the State Board of Education for increasing the academic performance of middle grade students and schools. These recommendations may result in proposed 2005 legislation.

High School Reform. High school reform in Florida provides added focus and rigor to academics for students in ninth through twelfth grade. Using reading as the foundation, all high school students should receive rigorous academic instruction through challenging curricula, provision of appropriate and effective remediation and academic intervention, and access to effective academic advisement to ensure that all students perform at high levels of academic achievement. To achieve these goals and sustain progress, schools must require students to complete a solid academic core, teach in ways that engage students in learning challenging content, and provide support and extra help for all students who have difficulty mastering the content.

Florida has 419 high schools. Approximately 35,656 teachers serve 781,271 students: 250,174 students in ninth grade; 202,392 students in tenth grade; 178,968 students in eleventh grade; and 149,737 students in twelfth grade. Academic performance data from the last two years indicate that some improvement is being made in high school student achievement. The percentage of students in ninth grade scoring level 1 or 2 decreased slightly in reading and mathematics, while the students in tenth grade scoring level 1 or 2 increased slightly in reading and decreased slightly in mathematics in 2004.

In the 2003-2004 school year, nearly 23% of all ninth grade students were retained. The percent of students retained in the ninth grade exceeds the percent of students retained at any other grade, kindergarten through twelfth grade. Approximately 4% of eighth grade students were retained and approximately 13.4% of tenth grade students were retained in the 2003-2004 school year. The retention of ninth grade students has also been steadily increasing over the last seven years, increasing to 52,398, or 22.48% of all ninth grade students in the 2003-2004 school year.

The National Governor's Association held an education summit focused on policies to improve America's high schools. The Association recently released a report entitled, "Getting it Done: Ten Steps to a State Action Agenda." Florida has already taken action in implementing these steps. Listed below are the ten steps, followed by the action that Florida has already taken to make them a reality in our high schools.

NGA Step #1: Create a permanent Education Roundtable or Commission to foster coordination between early childhood, K12, and higher education.

Florida's response:

- Florida has had an Articulation Coordinating Committee since 1971. The purpose of the committee is to ensure that all sectors are coordinating in areas of curriculum, standards, course transfer and policy consistency. Florida is widely known as having the strongest state and local level articulation agreements.

NGA Step #2: Define a rigorous college and work preparatory curriculum for high school graduation.

Florida's response:

- Florida's graduation requirements are some of the most rigorous in the nation. Florida requires 24 credits, at least three credits in the academic subject areas, including algebra, as well as a passing score on the state assessment test (FCAT).
- Florida's Sunshine State Standards are currently under review. Two nationally respected external evaluators are reviewing the standards to ensure rigor and relevance and alignment to postsecondary education. The International Center for Leadership in Education, under the leadership of Willard Daggett, is utilizing the Center's Curriculum Survey of Essential Skills data and rigor/relevance framework to provide a detailed analysis of the Sunshine State Standards and FCAT assessments. Secondly, the College Board is analyzing Florida's Sunshine State Standards and Grade Level Expectations for alignment from grade to grade through the postsecondary level as well as for rigor. These expert analyses along with statewide stakeholder input will provide the information necessary to produce revised academic standards for Florida in 2006-2007.

NGA Step #3: Challenge business, education, parent, community and faith-based organizations to support initiatives that improve college awareness.

Florida's response:

- The Governor's Mentoring Partnership provides active mentors to assist children across our state.
- Take Stock in Children mentoring and scholarship programs provide scholarships to at-risk youth who work hard, play by the rules and maintain good academic standing.
- Faith- and Community-Based Outreach Programs reach economically disadvantaged youth and their families.

NGA Step #4: Give college and work-readiness assessments in high school.

Florida's response:

- Students must earn passing scores on the grade 10 FCAT in order to graduate with a standard high school diploma.
- The state funds \$1.6 million to provide free PSAT or PLAN testing for all tenth grade students. This talent finding and planning measure has produced tremendous increases in Advanced Placement participation.

NGA Step #5: Create statewide common course agreements so that college-level work in high school counts toward a postsecondary credential.

Florida's response:

- Florida has had a statewide course numbering system for secondary and postsecondary education since 1975. Common courses are fully transferable among community colleges and public universities. For more information: http://scns.fldoe.org/scns/public/pb_index.jsp
- Florida has a statewide articulation agreement that governs articulation between secondary and postsecondary education institutions. The agreement governs acceleration mechanisms available for high school students, including dual enrollment, early admission, Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate Program, Advanced International Certificate of Education Program, and the Florida Virtual School.

NGA Step #6: Provide financial incentives for disadvantaged students to take rigorous AP exams and college-preparatory and college-level courses.

Florida's response:

- One Florida's Talented 20 Program provides access to state universities for class ranking and curriculum completion.
- Bright Futures Scholarships available for all high school students completing a college prep curriculum with the required grade point average and college entrance exam score. For more information: <http://www.firn.edu/doe/brfutures/>
- The Florida College Board Partnership provides support to teachers and students and has resulted in dramatic increases in AP enrollment and college credit acquisition among minority and disadvantaged youth.

NGA Step #7: Expand college-level learning opportunities in high school to minorities, English language learners, low-income students and youth with disabilities.

Florida's response:

- Florida maintains a statewide, online student advising system for students in grades 9-16 (www.FACTS.org).
- The College Board Partnership supports programs between school districts and community colleges for low-income and educationally-disadvantaged middle and high school students.



NGA Step #8: Help get low-performing students back on track by designing literacy and math recovery programs.

Florida's response:

- Florida requires an Academic Improvement Plan (AIP) for all students who fail to meet proficiency level and Individual Student Success Plans for each student in a low-performing school.

- Supplemental Academic Instruction categorical funds (nearly \$700,000,000 in the 04-05 year) are allocated to school districts for students who fail to meet proficiency levels for promotion or graduation.

NGA Step #9: Develop and fund supports to help students pass the high school exit exam.

Florida's response:

- School Improvement funds are dedicated to provide research-based reading and mathematics programs to low-performing students.
- Web-based tutorials on needed skill areas and remedial courses in Reading and Mathematics are provided. For more information: <http://www.fcatexplorer.com/>

NGA Step #10: Develop statewide pathways to industry certification.

Florida's response:

- Career programs are aligned to standard occupational classification codes linking programs with federally-identified standards for a particular occupation
- Career area state business advisory councils assist in identifying industry specific standards/certifications.

Return on Investment

One of Florida's goals is to deliver quality efficient services within the education system. The State Board of Education adopted the strategic imperative of aligning financial resources with performance expectations as the method for accomplishing the delivery of quality efficient services. Within this framework, the Return on Investment (ROI) website was created, which displays many indicators of school, district, and state performance. The sources for these measures are the comprehensive student, staff, and finance data systems maintained by the Department. This ROI website allows users to evaluate measures of performance in relation to the resources allocated to the individual schools and districts. An ROI index for each Florida public school was developed in order to relate financial resources expended at the school level with measures of student performance at that school. See figure 35 for an example of the ROI index. For more information: <http://web.fldoe.org/eds/ROI/>

Figure 35
Sample School Return on Investment (ROI) Index

LEON COUNTY KATE SULLIVAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL	
Return on Investment - Percentile Rank	School 95
Return on Investment - Percent of The Highest ROI Value	74%
Percent of Students with Learning Gains	
Mathematics	77%
Reading	67%
School Grade	A
Total Program Cost per WFTF	\$3,791
Student/Staff Indicators	Financial Indicators
<hr/> School Demographics School Staff School Student Performance School Students in Special Programs/School Discipline School Readiness District Community Information	<hr/> School Return on Investment Index School Total Program Costs Per Student District Revenues District Expenditures District Financial Margins and Reserves District Taxes District Debt

Sunshine Connections

Florida has entered into a five-year partnership with Microsoft to improve the availability of performance information and create access to learning objects and opportunities within the state. There are two major products envisaged by the partnership: a web-based product that will drive improvements in student performance by creating a new level of access to student-level data, curricula information, classroom planning tools, and professional development opportunities. This product will be made available to every public school teacher in Florida by the end of 2006. The second product, also web-based, will provide a new gateway for professional education interests and the general public to access and better understand education performance data throughout the state.

The first product is called "Sunshine Connections". It is a web-based portal environment which will link numerous student performance analytics to learning objects and curricula designed to improve student performance. These analytics will be further tied to professional development opportunities to assist teachers improve their professional skills and teaching techniques, especially in areas where the performance of students is weak. The second goal will be met by employing business intelligence tools in a web-based portal environment that provides access to education performance information available in the state's K20 Education Data Warehouse. Business intelligence tools will improve access to aggregate information about student and system performance. The performance information will be longitudinal, following student performance in several dimensions over time. It will be completely scalable with tight provisions protecting confidential information and accessible through intuitive menu systems.

Alternate Teaching Certification Programs and Educator Preparation Institutes

Alternative Certification—Designed to develop quality teachers, this research-based Program offers professional education preparation to newly hired teachers who already possess subject area expertise and who qualify for an initial Florida Certificate. Each Florida school district offers a competency-based, on-the-job alternative certification program - either a district-developed program that has been approved by the

Florida Department of Education or Florida's Alternative Certification Program. Florida's program has been featured as a model "emerging program" by the National Center for Alternative Certification. Over 800 participants have completed alternative programs since the statewide implementation in 2002 and over 2,300 are currently "in the pipeline."

Postsecondary Educator Preparation Institutes—Florida law was amended last year to authorize accredited and/or state board approved postsecondary institutions to seek approval from the Department of Education to create educator preparation institutes for the following purposes:

- Provide professional development instruction to assist teachers in improving classroom instruction and in meeting certification or re-certification requirements.
- Provide instruction to assist potential and existing substitute teachers in performing their duties.
- Provide instruction to assist paraprofessionals in meeting education and training requirements.
- Provide instruction for baccalaureate degree holders to become certified teachers in order to increase routes to the classroom for mid-career professionals and college graduates who were not education majors.

Approved educator preparation institutes are authorized to offer alternative certification programs specifically designed for non-education major baccalaureate degree holders to enable program participants to meet educator certification requirements. These programs shall be competency based and prepare educators through an alternative route.

Removing Barriers to Teacher Certification—Realizing the great demand for highly effective teachers and the competition nationwide, the State of Florida through the adoption of new statutes or statutory revisions has continuously removed unnecessary barriers for certification while offering pathways that ensure that quality standards are met. The Florida certification system continues to require, as a minimum, a bachelor's degree, a full state certificate, and subject area competency as now established in NCLB. However, the Florida system offers more options to qualify for a full-time certificate than most other states while not compromising quality by not issuing waivers or emergency credentials.

The multiple pathways for certification include: 1) full reciprocity by acceptance of another state's valid standard certificate eliminating all requirements other than an application and background screening, 2) full reciprocity by acceptance of national credentials such as certificates issued by NBPTS and ABCTE, eliminating all testing requirements, 3) acceptance of a passing score on a subject content test in lieu of required college majors or courses for initial certification as well as the addition of subject areas, 4) acceptance of non-education college majors and subject content courses to be combined with professional preparation that is completed on- the-job through alternative certification preparation programs offered by the local school districts and community colleges/universities, 5) issuance of an international exchange teacher certificate, and 6) traditional teacher preparation programs in colleges of education. These many options to establish certification eligibility have provided thousands of teachers for Florida classrooms and have helped meet the high demand resulting from growth and class-size reduction challenges.

Voluntary Prekindergarten Program (VPK)

Through an amendment to the State Constitution in 2002, Florida voters mandated that "Every four-year old child in Florida shall be provided by the State a high quality pre-kindergarten learning opportunity in the form of an early childhood development and education program which shall be voluntary, high quality, free and delivered according to professionally accepted standards." The Legislature enacted during the 2004

Special Session, and Governor Bush subsequently signed into law, legislation to implement the Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) Education Program.

This legislation assigns responsibilities for the day-to-day management of the program to the Agency for Workforce Innovation (AWI); licensing and credentialing to the Department of Children and Families (DCF); and the creation of standards, curriculum, and accountability to the Department of Education (DOE). All three agencies will be working closely together to provide leadership and support to the local early learning coalitions, school districts, and public and private providers to ensure the successful implementation of effective prekindergarten education programs for Florida's four-year-old children.

The VPK program will be available free this fall to all children who are four years old by September 1, with an estimated 155,000 children expected to participate. The VPK program will provide the opportunity to better prepare our young children for successful entry into kindergarten by focusing the Department of Education's efforts on early literacy.

The DOE Office of Early Learning has worked with nationally recognized experts and practitioners in early childhood education and emergent literacy to develop Florida's Early Learning Standards, which will comprise the foundation for prekindergarten education.

Data Infrastructure Capabilities

Florida is recognized as having the most robust information system of any state in the US. It is based upon unit records collected at the SEA and retained in a data warehouse with capabilities which are unparalleled. Over 6 years of matched data sets are available for making informed decisions. In another part of Florida's comprehensive information system, the class of 1991 has been tracked from graduation through employment.

In addition to collecting items which support the operation of the state's educational system, the data system is capable of and has been used for longitudinal studies about student progression and supports the extensive accountability and public reporting of information about the public schools. The system tracks course offerings, student attendance, and dropouts and is one of the few systems which is completely auditable by replications outside the system. It has allowed Florida to produce a graduation rate calculation which follows students from original entry in grade 9 through their final classification within the four-year cohort.

Outside Research Confirmation

Over the last year, Florida has received significant outside research confirmation and recognition of its sound education policies. Highlights are provided below. (See attached for complete information.)

- **Education Trust's Measured Progress Report (2004)**—Number one state in 4th grade reading and math with 15 and 12 point gains respectively.
http://www2.edtrust.org/NR/rdonlyres/F1C402F7-AB53-49ED-A9DC_27A41AA6E7E5/0/MeasuredProgressSumma99F.pdf
- **Manhattan Institute's Evaluation of Florida's Program to End Social Promotion (2004)**—Florida has successfully improved the academic proficiency of low-performing students.
http://www.manhattan-institute.org/html/ewp_07.htm

- **Harvard University's Program on Education Policy and Governance (2005)**—Choice provisions of A+ are more effective than NCLB's at leveraging student achievement gains.
http://www.ksg.harvard.edu/pepg/pdf/papers/FloridaPEPG_PR.pdf



Florida Department of Education
John L. Winn, Commissioner